PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ALASKA NATIVES: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Sarah Marie Ford

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Committee:

Dr. Bruce Collet, Advisor
Dr. Christopher Frey
Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen
ABSTRACT

Dr. Bruce Collet, Advisor

This research is a case study which looks at a school district in rural Alaska that serves a predominantly Alaska Native population. The research addresses the question of how the district is navigating the implementation of federal and state educational policy and simultaneously adapting initiatives to the local reality and addressing the needs and wishes of Native village communities.

To understand the policy implementation process in this specific context, the researcher coded and analyzed all documents provided to the school district’s board of education for their meetings from the 2004 through 2009. This data contained both explicit and implicit information about the challenges and relationships that make up a framework within which district administrators, board members, and community members work. In addition, it informed how this framework influences the policy implementation process within the district.

Though specific to the context of rural Alaska and education for Alaska Natives, this research explores the local-national dichotomy at play in policy implementation, especially concerning schooling in Native communities. By giving attention to the role of the school board in this process, it is providing insights into an area that is under researched.
DEDICATION

To the many teachers and administrators that I had the honor and pleasure to work with in Southwest Alaska. I would also like to dedicate this to my family. The love, support, and guidance of family have always been my strength to persevere.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the school district, where I interned, for opening their doors to me and providing me with a unique experience that I will continue to value and cherish. A sincere thanks also to my committee members, for their patience and dedication in helping me through this process.
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INTRODUCTION

Since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (2002), there has been a myriad of new challenges for schools and districts to overcome in order to adhere to and implement mandated policy. The threat of sanctions is a very real pressure that has the potential to drive the curricula and programs of schools. Schools and districts that serve a predominantly Native population are in a unique position.

There are multiple interrelated issues that such schools face. First of all, there are financial issues. Sufficient funding for the implementation of NCLB is lacking. Furthermore, meeting the infrastructural and facility needs that districts often have can be an additional serious financial burden, and one that is not uncommon to many rural Native school systems. Aside from dealing with the economic issues, in many predominantly Indigenous schools there is often a concern over the development of standardized curriculum focused on the core subjects of literacy, math, and science. While these subjects have their place in school curriculum, they often tend to overshadow other areas, such as Native language and culture programs, vocational programs, and other arts and music related programs. This can be counterproductive in encouraging student academic performance. Also, the NCLB policy implicitly works to homogenize and standardize schooling. Emphasis on testing in English threatens heritage language programs that immerse children in languages other than English. Efforts to establish school-based native language programs for the cultural and linguistic maintenance of a Native community are threatened by such aggressive policy.

While the effects of mandated educational policy can be felt around the country in different Native American contexts, this thesis looks specifically at these issues in a predominantly Native school district in rural southwest Alaska. Specific to Alaska Natives,
Jester (2005) comments that current educational legislation, including Alaska educational policy and the federal NCLB policy, are occurring within the broader context of a “transcultural and postcolonial context of Alaska Native education” (p. 865). This points to the importance of taking into consideration how the force of policy interacts with and limits Alaska Native self-determination in education.

In general, education for Native Americans has been transformed from a place of oppression to a place of potential self-determination (Lipka & McCarty, 1994). However, research focused on Alaska Native education points to a paradox in the educational system in that it both is promoting self-determination, yet supported and mandated largely by the government (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 25). While observations of Native self-determination in education reflects a general trend toward increased control of schooling since the 1960s, a comprehensive look at this issue shows that it is complex and often paradoxical.

This study observes the implementation of national and state policy in a particular school district in rural Native Alaska. Simultaneously, it observes the extent of Native self-determination in the creation and implementation of policy. I conducted a qualitative case study, in the form of document analysis, in a school district I refer to as the Rural Tundra School District. Recent initiatives in the Rural Tundra School District indicate possible district efforts to accommodate the Yup’ik Alaska Native majority of the region. At the same time, these initiatives may be in part motivated by the district’s desire to adhere to educational mandates. The fundamental question that I address in this research is the following: What role does the district have in policy as well as language program implementation? In other words, how has the district been navigating its position of needing both to implement higher-level educational policy, as well as to accommodate the local community? By accommodating the needs of the
local community, I mean not only the school-based Yup’ik culture and language programs, but more generally the Yup’ik villages’ concerns and desires for their communities’ schools.

To understand the complexity of the relationship between NCLB, state policy, and local initiatives, I also address the extent to which the Rural Tundra School District’s actions to develop the Yup’ik language program and other localized school-based initiatives are a result of the policy implementation process as presented by Odden (1991). Conversely, this study also examines the extent to which the mandates complicate the district’s efforts to develop programs relating to bilingual education and vocational education.

The documents used to answer these research questions are the school board meeting packets from 2004 through 2009. In these packets are all the documents that were provided to the board mostly by schools, offices, and departments within the district. They include specifically minutes from previous board meetings, reports from various district departments, individual schools, the superintendent, as well as correspondences concerning the board and the superintendent. In this way, these documents provide valuable information on the system of school governance in the district and the process of policy implementation as it occurs in the district. At the same time, the documents also give insights into other issues in the district such as building infrastructure in villages, maintaining adequate quality facilities, and specific student organizations, all of which affect the service the district provides to the region’s communities.

School governance as it currently functions in Native schools is an area with little research. This study brings to light the complexities of the implementation process of federal and state policy in the Rural Tundra School District in tandem with the roles and dynamics in place among involved actors in providing education. Although the findings are highly contextualized
and context-specific, they nonetheless add to the body of knowledge of both Native American education in the era of NCLB as well as Native American school governance.
CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The background and contemporary context of Native American education is complex and encompasses a history of colonization and assimilation as well as a new era of self-determination, decolonization and social justice. Specifically the boarding school experience, issues of access to public education and underfunding of Indian schools, and historic assimilationist goal of Native American schooling, have established a mistrust of the public school system (Alston & Trujillo, 2005, p. 16). It is this mistrust that Native communities are working to overcome in the struggle for self-determination in education. It continues to be a struggle, as the educational policies and practices fluctuate and change.

It is important to recount, briefly at least, the history of education for American Indians and Alaska Natives in order to accurately portray the context in which education for Indigenous groups of the United States functions. As Jester (2005) points out, education policy occurs in Native Alaskan schooling in the broader context of postcolonialism and transculturalism. The same is true of schooling for American Indians, the Native Americans of the lower forty-eight, but there are significant differences between the historical experiences of both these groups. Educational methods of American Indians and Alaska Natives were kept intact during the initial phases of contact with the European immigrants (Alston & Trujillo, 2005) and for Alaska Natives this was preceded by even earlier Russian contact. Even as this European presence increased in close proximity with the Indigenous peoples, Native education practices continued.

Only when U.S. expansion began to overwhelm the Indian communities with military, political, economic, and social force did indigenous education systems fail to prepare its people for these affronts to their survival….Maintaining traditional ways of living was
discouraged and punished by the expansion of non-indigenous people” (Alston & Trujillo, p. 6).

Federal Assimilative Education Policies

The following section, and in much of the areas concerning the Alaska Native perspective on colonization and education, I draw largely from Bernhardt (2001) who has published an extensive review of Alaska Native education history. The establishment of treaties, reservations, the passing of the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, establishment of boarding schools and multiple policies not directly related to education represent a federal belief system that “endorsed and ensured restricted environments in which the government could control nearly all aspects of American Indian life” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 9). History has demonstrated that instead of allowing the native groups themselves to control the education provided to them, the signing of treaties, in which federal responsibility for Native American schooling was identified, and the subsequent educational efforts initiated a new educational experience aimed at eliminating Native Americans' heritage culture (Alston and Trujillo, 2005; Bernhardt, 2001). Almost 400 treaties were negotiated from 1778 to 1871 between the United States government and Indian nations. This simultaneously forced the Federal government on some level to recognize the sovereignty and independent nation status of Indian tribes as well as to establish a precedent for federal control of Indian affairs, including education (Bernhardt, 2001).

One significant way in which American Indian and Alaska Native histories diverge is involvement in treaty signing. Purchased from Russia in 1867, Alaska was not involved with original treaty deliberations between the United States and Indian Nations (Bernhardt, 2001). Although the United States applied many of the same assimilative educational policies toward Alaska Natives as they did toward American Indians, they differed in their treatment regarding
land rights. It was not until later in the 20th century that Alaska Natives were viewed as having land claims to vast tracts of tribal property as American Indians were (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 7). Even though the U.S. government was initially ambiguous in determining its responsibility toward Alaska Natives, with the United States’ purchase of Alaska in 1867, the U.S. government’s emphasis on English-only policies with American Indians was carried over into the relationship between Alaska Natives and the U.S. government (Bernhardt, 2001; Lipka & McCarty, 1994).

The legal basis for federal provisions for schooling to Native Americans began with the 1819 Civilization Fund Act and was more concretely laid out in the peace policy under the U.S. Grant administration. The Civilization Act of 1819 established a legal basis of federal responsibility to educate all American Indian and Alaska Native children, regardless if they were covered by treaty arrangements. It initiated a program whereby the federal government contracted with religious groups to operate schools for American Indian children (Bernhardt, 2001; Trujillo, 2005). The majority of boarding schools were founded under Grant’s Peace Policy (1870). These boarding schools’ linguistically and culturally assimilative practices were done through punishing children for speaking any language other than English, teaching Christianity, and the physical distance and separation from children’s families and communities (Alston and Trujillo, 2005; Bernhardt, 2001). In the 1920s and the 1930s, two-thirds of Alaska Native children who were in school were in federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and the large majority of these were BIA day schools in villages. High schools on the other hand were boarding schools located far from the student’s native village. This meant that very few Alaska Native students were able to attend church affiliated or BIA high schools (Bernhardt, 2001).
The 1928 Meriam Report, officially entitled The Problem of Indian Administration, helped determine the effectiveness of boarding school education and recommended moving Indian students from boarding to day schools, with Indian involvement at all levels of the educational process. The report also specifically recommended that education be tied to communities, and that Indian language and culture be included in the development of the curriculum (Winstead, Lawrence, Brantmeier, & Frey, 2008; Bernhardt, 2001). In these respects, the Meriam Report was ahead of its time in that it advocated that Native Youth “learn both White and Indian worlds” (Winstead et al., 2008, p. 49). The Meriam Report did however mention benefits to maintaining the boarding school system including consideration for travel distances. Ultimately, it failed to end the practice of Indian boarding schools.

The Indian Reorganization Act enacted in 1934, was "a significant piece of Indian legislation" and "provided for Indian political self-government and economic self determination by allowing tribes to organize and incorporate" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 13). Subsequently, in 1936 Congress passed the Alaska Reorganization Act, authorizing the “creation of reservations on land occupied by Alaska Natives,” however, being less “tribally oriented” than American Indians, they were “granted special permission to establish village governments and constitutions, and most groups chose this option” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 13). In nearly every rural community in Alaska today, there are tribal councils. These councils often are the means by which Alaska Natives persevere in the on-going struggle to exercise self-determination and sovereignty. In September, 2000, the governor of Alaska signed an administrative order that directed state agencies and officials to give the 227 federally recognized tribal governments in Alaska their due recognition (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 13).
The historical context which helps structure Alaska Native education significantly differs in some instances from American Indian education (Bernhardt, 2001). While all Indigenous groups in North America may share general similarities of a recent history involving colonization and domination by European-Americans, Alaska Natives experienced their first contact with colonizers not from settlers moving westward, but from Russian explorers sailing eastward, fur traders and missionaries in the early 1700s. Before control of Alaska was handed over to the United States, the Russian Orthodox Church established some schools for Alaska Natives, which enabled literacy in Russian and Aleut languages to flourish, and initiated a brief golden age of biculturalism and bilingualism (Bernhardt, 2001; Lipka & McCarty, 1994). This points out distinctly different experiences with colonization and formal education from that of American Indians of the lower forty-eight states.

As previously mentioned, the situation changed after the United States replaced Russia as the dominant power of the Alaska territory in 1867. Alaska Native groups were not part of the original treaty signing process that American Indians were, a process that ended toward the end of the nineteenth century (McCarty, 2004). The passing of the Organic Act in 1884 was the first legislation to address in some form the issue of education for Alaska Natives. This legislation established the first civil government in Alaska and "provided the legal basis for federal provision of education" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 11) which essentially made the Office of the United States Secretary of the Department of the Interior initially responsible for the schooling of all children regardless of race. In 1888 this responsibility was delegated to the Bureau of Education.

A dual system of education emerged in Alaska when non-native towns were allowed to establish schools, and with the passing of the Nelson Act in 1905, extended schooling outside of incorporated towns for "white children and children of mixed blood leading a civilized life"
Schools for Native children were run by the federal Bureau of Education. By 1950, 93 federal BIA day schools and three boarding schools still remained in Alaska. The majority of Alaska Native students attended elementary school in their own rural villages where there was only one school—run either by the Territory or by the BIA. However, approximately 30 to 40 communities including 1,800 children were without any facilities at all (Bernhardt). When Alaska achieved statehood in 1959, “the state and federal school systems were still a dual presence in rural Alaska” (p. 14). While the former racial segregation was no longer practiced in most communities, there was the continuation of other negative consequences from the dual system, including high expenses, competition for teachers and resources, and a general lack of coordination between the two school systems (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 14).

The level of disorder that existed in the rural educational system in Alaska even in the 1970s is found in the account of federal policies, which indicates that in the late 1960s “Alaska was viewed by the BIA as a major educational problem area, second only to the Navajo Reservation” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 21; Szasz, 1974). The lack of high school facilities was particularly worrisome for the “enrollment-conscious” Branch of Education in the late 1960s (Bernhardt, 2001).

Educational Paradigm Change for Alaska Native and American Indians

The history of Native American sovereignty in education can be seen in two major eras: the assimilation era, strongest throughout the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, and a self-determination era, initiated with the civil rights movement. In most cases during the assimilation era, Native Americans had little power over or involvement in their own educational affairs. The situation for American Indians and Alaska Natives, began to change due to the
political movements of the 1960s, namely the civil rights movement.

The momentum created from the civil rights movement, allowed American Indians and Alaska Natives to capitalize on the momentum and supportive foundation created in this period and become sophisticated public advocates for Indigenous causes (Bernhardt, 2001, p.15). Specifically the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Indian Education Act of 1972 “paved the way for changes in government run schools” (Alston and Trujillo, 2005, p. 7). After a decade of American Indian activism, the enactment of the Indian Self-Determination Assistance Act in 1975 marked the onset of the self-determination era by prompting a “gradual shift toward reclaiming self-government” (Alston and Trujillo, p. 7; Bernhardt, 2001; Winstead et al., 2008). Specifically, the Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act was created with the “outward intent of providing increased opportunities for local control” including “authority for tribes to contract directly with the BIA to conduct or administer all or part of the Indian programs conducted by the Federal Department of the Interior” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 18). Furthermore, in the Civil Rights Act of 1968 were five titles specifically dealing with Native Americans. Additionally, several parts of Title VII Bilingual Education legislation of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), had “immediate implications for many American Indian and Alaska Native students, as well” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 16). These amendments provided major changes in the administration of education programs by increasing local communities’ control. In Alaska, these laws expanded local authority to over teacher recruitment, as well as curriculum design (Bernhardt). For Alaska Natives, one of the most significant pieces of legislation was the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).

Alaska Native self-determination broadened with the enactment of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, signed into law in 1971. Through this, they achieved what was at the
time possibly “the most comprehensive and far-reaching legal settlement of aboriginal claims to land and its resources yet witnessed in the contemporary world” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 20). Since the time Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, the Alaska Native People had never been granted title to any significant amount of their aboriginal land nor compensated for it (Bernhardt, 2001). "Through ANCSA, Alaska Natives received title to 40 million acres of land and $962.5 million dollars in compensation for lands ceded to the federal government” (Bernhardt, p. 20).

Twelve regional Native profit making corporations (along with 'village corporations' in each community) were established that coincided with the various cultural and linguistic regions of Alaska intended to use the land and invest the money in ways collectively beneficial to the Native Community (Bernhardt). This newly established control in Native communities eventually lead to increased community oriented, Alaska Native self-determination in the educational realm.

The level of disorder caused by the dual system of schools and the lack of local high school facilities, lead to an attempt in 1971 by the Alaska state legislature to make state-operated schools responsible for rural education and eliminate the dual system of education in some communities. This initiative was blocked by Alaska Native groups, who fought for more local control over their schools. As a result, twenty-one Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAs), which function as separate rural school districts, were established in Alaska (Bernhardt, 2001, p.21). The REAs are similar to school districts in urban areas but without a local government or tax base. Since there is little tax base in these areas to draw upon, REAs receive funding directly from the state legislature rather than from local government (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 21). This development gave Native Alaska village communities direct involvement and control in schools in that (1) each REA established its own locally elected school board and
selected its own superintendent and (2) each REAA was provided with enough latitude to design its schooling policies and practices in ways that are appropriate for the particular region and for the cultural and linguistic group of people that it serves. Although the responsibilities and actions assumed by the school boards and administrators vary from region to region, generally boards today participate directly in forming policies regarding budgets, hiring, curriculum development, and assessment (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 21).

Despite the formation of REAAs, there was no comprehensive effort by the state and federal governments to deal with the lack of high schools in rural areas until a landmark 1974 lawsuit. Prior to the lawsuit, nearly all rural and Native secondary students in Alaska had been attending federal Bureau of Indian affairs boarding schools in southeast Alaska, Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 22). The 1974 class action lawsuit (named initially after student, Molly Hootch, and later renamed the Tobeluk v. Lind case) charged the state with discriminatory practices "for not providing local high school facilities to predominantly Native communities when it did for same-size, predominantly non-Native communities" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 22). The trial concluded in 1976 and in the settlement, the state of Alaska agreed to “establish a high school program in every community in Alaska where there was an elementary school, (which required a minimum enrollment of eight students) and one or more secondary students, unless the community specifically declined such a program" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 22). During the year after the settlement nearly 30 new high schools were established, with student enrollments between 5 and 100. As of 2001, there were "over 120 small high schools in Alaska villages, nearly all operated by the REAA in which they are located" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 22).
Though the legislation of the 1960s and 1970s expanded Native self-determination in education, in reality there were still limited opportunities to exercise newly established control in education. In 1984, “only 10 BIA-operated schools were available for tribal contracting in Alaska. Of these, only five were contracted to Native governments in 1983” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 18). Even though the effects were not immediate, these federal initiatives created an impact that allowed for unprecedented reforms for local control and increased support for Alaska Native language and culture in schools (Bernhardt, 2001).

In 1990 the Alaska Natives Commission, a joint federal-state commission, was developed to "help untangle the ambiguous relationships between Alaska Natives and the various layers of government" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 23). The commission, created by the urging of Alaska Native groups and funded jointly by the state of Alaska and the federal government, was directed to conduct a comprehensive study on the socioeconomic status of Alaska Natives and how policies and programs of the United States affect them, as well as recommend specific actions to Congress and the State of Alaska.

The passage of the Native Claims Settlement Act, established local control, which made possible the decentralization of the federal and state school systems and the rapid development of an extensive network of village high schools, resultant from the formation of REAAs and the *Tobeluk v. Lind* case. This development illustrates the rapid, major changes Rural Alaskan Natives have experienced in the last five decades. (Bernhardt, 2001). For the first time in the history of schooling in Alaska, Native people are defining education in their own terms. "Students today are growing up in a political, social, economic environment that is dramatically different from that of their parents and grandparents” and at the same time, “today's high school
students are the first to be able to attend the same high school their parents likely attended in their home community" (Bernhardt, pp. 25-26).

Western schools for American Indians and Alaska Natives have always been sites which compromise Native cultural and linguistic identity. In general, earlier federal policies toward the Indigenous population have historically been assimilative. With the civil rights movement came a new era of Native American self-determination which began to be realized, at least in some small form, in formal education. Federal policies on Indigenous education in the United States have fluctuated from “assimilation with the goal of extinguishing indigenous languages and cultural traditions to more recent emphasis on local and tribal self-determination" (Lipka & McCarty, 1994, p. 266). Though the days of explicit English-only policies and assimilative practices of boarding schools are by and large a thing of the past, the effects of these assimilative practices linger as well as the need to address contemporary issues and concerns in American Indian and Alaska Native Education. Jester (2005) cites Kawagley (1995) commenting that, "the modern public schools are not made to accommodate differences in world views, but to impose another culture—their own. This has had a confusing effect on the Native students" (p.865). Though Alaska Native and American Indian communities have expanded their control in the schooling system, schools remain a site of cultural and linguistic compromise for both the Native communities and the students.

Current State of Education for American Indians and Alaska Natives

The National Center for Education Statistics showed that in 2002, approximately one percent “of the nation’s public elementary and secondary school students were American Indians/Alaska Natives, a proportion that remained fairly consistent since 1986” (Alston and Trujillo, 2005, p. 1). There are alarming statistics concerning the population of Native students in
the United States today. Alston and Trujillo (2005) state that Native Americans “have the lowest matriculation rates and the second highest dropout rates of all students in the country" and "in 2003, 15 percent of Native youths 16- to 24- years old had not completed high school or earned a G.E.D. credential" (p. 2). Furthermore Native Americans were less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree or advanced degree than the non-Native peers, despite the fact that in the last thirty years both the number of Native Americans enrolled in degree granting institutions as well as the rate of attainment for each level of degree has doubled (p. 2).

Alston and Trujillo (2005) attribute some of the lags in attainment for Native American youth to high rates of poverty, unemployment, suicide, early school leaving, and serious health risks as well as the "lack of alignment between students' home culture and public schools' teaching methods” (p. 2). These troubling findings indicate the scope of challenges schools face in providing education to Native youth.

**Geographical and Social Context for Rural Alaska Natives**

Alaska's landmass is equal in size to one third of the rest of the United States, has more coastline than the east and west coasts of the contiguous states combined and it is isolated from other states by its far northern position. These factors, along with a population of approximately 630,000 (according to the 2000 census), indicate an area geographically unique from the lower forty-eight and one that is largely rural (Bernhardt, 2001, pp. 3-4). The state has the largest percentage of Native Americans of any U.S. state, with 16 percent as of 2004, and has the highest percentage of Native American students, with 26 percent (Alston &Trujillo, 2005; Bernhardt, 2001).

Although the diversity among Native groups in Alaska is great, this thesis focuses on the Yup’ik, also referred to as Yup’ik Eskimo. Who live along the Northern, Western, and
Southwestern coastal areas of Alaska as well as in the southwestern inland areas. (Bernhardt, 2001, p.5). With a population of approximately 55,000, the Yup'ik Alaska Native group is the largest in Alaska, and third largest in the US behind the Tsalagi (Cherokee) and Diné (Navajo) (Alston & Trujillo, 2005). There are twenty Native languages in Alaska in four language families, Yup'ik language being in the Eskimo-Aleut family. Children still speak their Native language as a first language in only two of the twenty languages of Alaska, Central Yup’ik being one that is still passed down generationally in this manner (Bernhardt, 2001, Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998).

The majority of those who reside in rural Alaska are Alaska Natives, living in villages with 25 to 5000 residents. In fact, "the terms ‘rural’ and ‘native’ are frequently used interchangeably" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 4). Alaska Natives living in rural areas today continue to maintain a distinct and unique lifestyle. Bernhardt (2001) gives the following description of rural village life:

Even though in most rural communities today one will see trucks, cars, snow machines, refrigerators, televisions, computers, telephones, and modern school buildings, these will be next to log cabins, dog teams, fish wheels, food caches, meat drying racks, and outhouses. Each village has at least one store, but many Native residents continue to practice a subsistence lifestyle and depend heavily on moose, caribou, seal, walrus, whale, fish, and berries for the supply of food (p. 4).

Nearly sixty percent of Alaska Native students continued to attend school in rural and remote communities in 2001 and they make up the large majority of students in rural village schools. These schools typically have a K-12 organization and small enrollments ranging from eight students with one teacher to 500 students with ten or more teachers (Bernhardt, 2001). Due to the
small enrollments, students are frequently in multi-graded settings, with instruction in the early years possibly in a Native language. This language component is an option available in some Alutiiq, Cup'ik, Geit'chin, Inupiat, Siberian Yup'ik, Tlingit, and Central Yup'ik communities. The schools in rural village communities, such as Yup’ik villages, often involve the community. For example, community members serve as classroom and bilingual teacher aides. Many schools now incorporate, into the school or district curriculum, Alaska Native issues and perspectives and traditional knowledge, which often involves elders of the community. In addition, Native teachers make up a significant number of the educators in rural Alaskan schools that serve a primarily Native population, with “approximately 475 Alaska Native teachers (6% of the total number of Alaska teachers)” teaching in village schools” (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 24). These teachers are also fundamental in creating and maintaining Native language programs.

The district center for an area consisting primarily of rural village schools is a Rural regional center. A Rural regional center is a larger rural community, where the population is 30 to 50 percent non-Native and has characteristics of both the village schools and urban schools. These schools are often administered by the same REAA that district or borough as the village schools in that region. Depending on the Alaska Native representation in a particular school’s population, the range of special programs for Alaska Native and American Indian students, and curriculum components varies (Bernhardt, 2001).

Forces Shaping Indigenous language and cultural maintenance programs

School-based Native heritage language programs are currently one of the most crucial elements in preventing Native language loss to American Indian and Alaska Native communities. "Since the opening of the Rough Rock Demonstration School in 1966, organized language teaching and revitalization efforts have been located almost exclusively in educational
institutions" (Winstead et al., 2008, p. 58). However, recognition of this fact does not minimize the complex dynamics that are at play. The specific context and educational legislation pertinent to Alaska Natives, as well as the educational policies that are currently involved in the dialogue surrounding Native school-based programs, are forces that are shaping the fate of Indigenous language and culture programs. Efforts to establish self-determination in education, especially in regards to language maintenance face numerous challenges including: allocating sufficient teachers and having them adequately prepared, implementing and complying with educational mandates, and working to integrate the local community wishes and efforts with those of the district. These challenges are confronted in national and state legislation, community dynamics, the role of Native teachers, and the general relationship between the school and community.

National and State legislation

Federal legislation plays a powerful role in discourse and practice of Native culture and language education. In the early and mid 1990s, legislation was passed that further expanded Native linguistic self-determination in the educational realm. The Native American Languages Act (NALA) of 1990/1992 was extremely significant in that it supported the preservation, protection, and promotion of the use of Native languages in public schools and as the language of instruction (Alston & Trujillo, 2005; Winstead et al., 2008). The act was also necessary because most public policy until then had worked to suppress the use of Native languages (Alston & Trujillo). Even more recently, The 2006 Native American Languages Preservation Act (NALPA) incorporates recommendations given to Congress including establishing language nests, language survival schools, language restoration and revitalization programs, and Native language teacher preparation (Winstead et al., 2008). "While NALPA does not resolve the ambiguities regarding Native language use in NCLB, it does assert the importance of Native
language learning and use among American Indian/Alaska Native schoolchildren, whether their schools serve primarily Indigenous children or not” (Winstead et al., p. 55).

In Alaska, the state’s Content and Performance Standards are a comprehensive set of Cultural Standards for Students developed in 1998 by Alaska Native educators from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN). The Cultural Standards for Students are aimed at producing “culturally knowledgeable students” and address involvement in the student’s community, grounding in the cultural heritage, and “traditional ways of knowing and learning” including the role of local heritage in “fostering a sense of who they are and how they understand the world around them” (Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development, 2006, pp. 37-40). In addition, a more extensive set of cultural standards was created by the ANKN, which are intended not only for students, but also for educators, schools, curriculum, and communities (Alaska Native Knowledge Network [ANKN], 1998). Bernhardt (2001) adds that ANKN has developed a comprehensive set of “relevant and tested curriculum resources that build upon Alaska Native ways of knowing” as well as Alaska Native educators with administrative experience in education reform, and a “cadre of Alaska Native elders who are directly involved in decision-making related to educational policy and practice” (p. 26).

The need to work toward the preservation and maintenance of Native languages was not finished with the 1990 [NALA] legislation, the 2006 NALPA legislation, or with the adoption by individual states of standards that are inclusive of Native values. In recent years there has been a growing movement toward English-only policies that have threatened American Indian and Alaska Native efforts to help their youth keep or learn their ancestors’ languages (Alston & Trujillo, 2005), as well as implicit language policy in the educational mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002.
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), is a strong force in shifting educational focus in a way that is drastically affecting school-based language and culture programs, as well as Native self-determination efforts. In its congressional statement of purpose NCLB describes its goal as meeting “the educational needs of low achieving children in our nations highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children in need of reading assistance” (US Commission on Civil Rights, 2004, p.3). Specifically for Native Americans, NCLB claims to “support the efforts of local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations…to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Native students” (NCLB, 7102 (a)). While NCLB's provisions toward Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education may seem initially appealing, as it "authorizes culturally related activities, early childhood and family education, enrichment programs, career preparation”, and the promotion of culturally responsive teaching and learning, the reality is less appealing:

In practice, these activities are highly constrained by a rigid and punitive accountability system that fails to consider improvements over previous performance, is blind to racial discrimination and attendant school funding inequities, and uses English standardized tests as the sole measure of proficiency (McCarty, p. 2).

Furthermore, although the NCLB does support Indigenous language instruction to some degree, it is clear that students should have primary linguistic proficiency in English (Winstead et al.,). This illustrates the concern that public education in the United States still apparently fails to recognize diversity as an asset, “which raises the strong possibility that unique heritages,
dialects, and values of particular cultural groups will be excluded with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, state standards, and high-stakes testing” (Manuelito, 2003, pp. 2-3).

Additionally, while NCLB does identify schools that are failing to meet AI/AN students' needs, insufficient funding and a "punitive approach to enforcing accountability, prevents the law from fulfilling its potential" (Alston & Trujillo, 2005, p. 19). Also, as a result of the implementation of the NCLB Act, there has been a "rolling back of tribal sovereignty and increased intrusion of state and federal control" in education. The majority of state governments are increasing control over teacher certification and student standards. This shift in power and relationships comes “under the auspices of the federal requirements for highly qualified teachers and the adequate yearly progress (AYP) expectations of NCLB" (Alston & Trujillo, p. 19). The use of standards that do not take into consideration the linguistic and cultural needs of students is seen by some educators and Native American community members as an affront to the efforts to "involve families and communities in the everyday education of their children" and shape policy that effects their education (Alston and Trujillo, p. 19).

Testing mandated by NCLB Act has been criticized due to related unrealistic standards, unfair expectations, and a focus on yearly performance rather than longitudinal improvement (McCarty, 2008; Alston & Trujillo, 2005). McCarty (2008) comments further that other main problems of the NCLB legislation are the disproportionately negative impacts on high-poverty schools, lack of a mechanism to recruit and retain highly-qualified teachers in underperforming schools, rigidity of the enforcement process, emphasis on a narrow set of outcomes, and use of theories of education reform that do not work in practice. There are concerns about the law, namely its "negative impacts on culturally based instruction,” and “hyper-attention to
standardized tests” (McCarty, 2008 p. 3; Beaulieu et al., 2005). The possible impacts affect tribal sovereignty in education and have been shown to negatively effect Native students (McCarty, 2008; Alston and Trujillo, 2005).

Despite the law’s “hyper attention” toward standardized tests, “there is a negative correlation between test pressure and test-score gains” (McCarty, 2008, p. 4; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2006). NCLB’s push to increase English language immersion for English language learners, when subjected to highly scripted remedial English instruction, standardized test scores for Native students declined by as much as 50 percent over a three year period (p. 4). The national push for standardization, especially evident in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has created significant challenges to all those indigenous communities, many of which are working to use schools as a place for cultural and linguistic maintenance. Furthermore, potential school closures under NCLB endanger “these sites of Indigenous language learning, ironically because students are not achieving on the English-language state assessments” (Winstead et al., 2008, p. 58). The threat of punitive actions such as school closure, jeopardize the overall viability of Native language maintenance in public schools.

NCLB not only exerts pressure on school districts to perform well on standardized tests, but also mandates standards in hiring teachers "To be 'highly qualified', a teacher must hold a bachelor’s degree, have a state teaching certification or passed the state teacher licensing examination, and have demonstrated knowledge of the subject that he or she teaches" (Hess & Petrilli, 2007, p. 65). The requirements for obtaining teacher certification are left largely for the states to decide.

Up until 2005, 'alternative licensure' programs in 46 states, which accounted for approximately 20 percent of the teachers entering the workforce, “enabled individuals to enter
the teaching profession from non traditional backgrounds and without attendance at a college of
education” (Hess & Petrilli, 2007, p. 68). Unfortunately, under NCLB "highly qualified teachers"
may not hold provisional or emergency licenses, even if these are temporarily given in order for
the teacher to obtain certification through an alternative program. Although the law "explicitly
mentions alternate routes as legitimate ways for a teacher to gain certification", it "outlaws the
very mechanism most states use to facilitate them" (Hess & Petrilli, 2007, pp. 80-81). Districts
are faced with serious challenges in recruiting and hiring “highly qualified” teachers. This is a
problem that is perhaps even more pronounced in rural Alaska, where very few of the
predominantly Native population have the credentials to teach in a highly qualified teaching
position. Also, the remote location of schools is a factor deterring “outsiders” from teaching
there. It is common in these rural districts that many Native adults work in the schools as teacher
aides, which has historically been afforded through Title I funding. However, NCLB
requirements bring into question whether they were “performing duties better handled by trained
certified teachers and that they might be having a negative impact on student achievement" (Hess

Community Dynamics and the Role of Native Teachers

Native communities themselves have to decide if they want to teach the heritage
language or culture in schools, and then they have to determine exactly how to go about
instruction. There are some common pitfalls in creating Native language and culture curriculum.
This most often happens when traditional elements of the native culture are taught in isolation
versus the integration of Native knowledge in other academic subjects. In this way, Native
curriculum is trivialized and left on the margins of core content areas (Manuelito, 2003, p. 3).
Immersing Native students in the culture and language to which they belong is a more effective
approach to Native language maintenance (Alston & Trujillo, 2005, p. 12). Furthermore, Native educators who have successfully taught their Native language did so in an environment where educators: respected and valued the students' language and culture; encouraged regular practicing of the language throughout the day not just as a curriculum subject; and integrated cultural activities such as singing, dancing, storytelling (Alston & Trujillo).

At any rate, a Native community must be engaged in its school-based language or culture program for it to be successful. However, community members often harbor conflicting views of how Native curriculum should be included, if at all. Often, even when Native communities claim dedication to promoting and maintaining Native language and education in schools, in practice they do not actually support its inclusion. As a result of being greatly impacted by centuries of colonization, Native people are sometimes skeptical of fellow Natives guiding their education, and more supportive of non-Natives doing so (Manuelito, 2003). In fact, many community members are suspicious of having their languages and cultures included in the school curriculum “because they feel it may hinder school learning" (Manuelito, 2003, p. 3). So the role of the Native linguistic and cultural knowledge in the curriculum is an intensely debated element in Native school-based programs, and can create rifts between educators, community members, and school administrators.

In a study of 27 Native teacher preparation programs for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Hawaiians, nearly all respondents (95% - 97%) felt “Native/tribal ‘language’ should be included in the schooling of Native children” and that “Native/tribal 'culture' also should be included" (Manuelito, 2003, pp. 4-5). This indicates the role that Native educators could have in initiating and sustaining school-based programs. After all, it is the Native educator that has to
carry out any language and culture program in the classroom. Their willingness and enthusiasm about language and culture programs are vital.

Not solely because of their indicated interest in having school-based language and culture programs, but also due to their local traditional and social knowledge, Native teachers are valuable in helping Native students achieve. Alston & Trujillo (2005) state that research on the Native teaching force has shown that: (1) students' desire to stay in school is enhanced when the teacher shares the same language and culture, (2) "Native educators are important role models for students, especially when they have cultural knowledge, hold high expectations for students, show students respect, and insist on respect for themselves," (3) Native educators are more likely to have and use knowledge of Native learning styles to be more effective teachers for Native students, and (4) Native educators "help build support for maintaining indigenous languages and cultures, while ensuring that students are prepared to function well in the larger society" (pp. 14-15).

In general, both Native and non-Native educators need to be aware of and consider Native students particular cultural tendencies. Bates (2008) claims that it is an elitist position that "a good teacher is a good teacher no matter the locale or the backgrounds of the students" (p. 115). He urges that educators take into serious consideration that when children’s culture differs from the mainstream culture of the social system, they potentially possess a very different way of looking at things, different cultural values and linguistically as well as culturally have experienced something much different than the mainstream. Sociocultural context needs to be taken into consideration in adapting and implementing policy so that it allows for practices that are effective. This consideration should be addressed in teacher preparation programs.
Quicho and Rios (2000) argue that an underlying problem in the educational system is a lack of fundamental questioning by Native educators of the system and its relation to Native students and teachers. They advocate that it is important to consider whether educators must “reproduce the status quo” or if they can “lead toward a new more hopeful vision of the possibilities of democracy” (p. 486). Quicho and Rios further point out that “most administrative positions appear to be held by non-minorities” (Forster 1994), and pluralistic education is often perceived by non-minorities as unnecessary (Klassen & Carr, 1997)” (p. 519). It is plausible that the Native or non-Native status of administrators is a key factor in the endorsement of linguistic and cultural content in the curriculum. In any case and whatever their motives, local administrators are decisive actors in the efforts made to enhance cultural and linguistic maintenance, evident in their having played “critical roles in both [the Rough Rock School and the Ciulistet group] cases” and “alternatively facilitating or impeding the groups' efforts” (Lipka & McCarty, 1994, p. 279).

The extent to which schools are willing to support a culturally responsive pedagogy can be a cause for tension in the school climate (Quicho & Rios 2000), but such tension may be the outcome of more than just attitudes toward culturally responsive education. The pressures on school district administrators to comply with state and federal educational policy can limit development and support for curriculum and resources for local Native language and culture programs.

In Alaska, Native educators began to make headway in developing culturally responsive curriculum through the Ciulistet teachers program. Ciulistet is an example of the significance of teacher education programs in Indigenous education. This program initiated a forum of sorts
where Indigenous Yup'ik educators together began to critically examine the "dilemma of formal schooling and maintaining local language, culture, and community" (Lipka & McCarty, 1994). The work of the Ciuliset group illustrates the claim made by Quicho and Rios pertaining to the advancement of culturally responsive curriculum, as it deepened a 'schism' between the Southwest region school district Yup'ik regional board members and Yup'ik educators. The board members in this case advocating English and western culture in schools, while Yup'ik educators of the Ciuliset group were pushing to include more Yup'ik culture and language into the curriculum (Lipka & McCarty, 1994).

It is undeniably valuable to have Native teachers in the classrooms who are prepared to teach, regardless of the presence of Native language and culture program in schools. However, schools face a challenge in recruiting Native teachers who are highly qualified (Alston & Trujillo, 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Education, districts would be 'out of compliance' if they hired new teachers for Title I schools who do not hold a bachelor’s degree or a state teaching certificate. The same would be true for districts with veteran teachers who were still not highly qualified after 2006 (Hess & Petrilli, 2007, p. 90). This and other stipulations of the No Child Left Behind Act may give indication as to pressures at work within a given school district in rural Alaska. There are ongoing efforts to certify more Native educators. Tribal universities and tribal colleges currently in collaboration with state universities, and state colleges produce the majority of Native educators (Alston & Trujillo, 2005).

Manuelito (2003) indicates that considerations need to be made in training, preparing, and credentialing Native Americans to enter the classroom to lead cultural and language maintenance programs. Based on survey results from Native students in teacher preparation programs, only about a quarter of respondents felt prepared to teach their Native language or
Native culture in schools (Manuelito, 2003, p. 5). It is crucial that in recruiting and training Native teachers there is “careful advising in course selection and quantity,” scholarships are used as a “motivational tool,” “students are aware of support services, monitoring student progress, and “lowering bureaucratic hurdles” (Quicho & Rios, 2000, p. 519). Quicho and Rios also mention that Lipka (1994) “found that Native Yup’ik teachers in Alaska had difficulty being hired and retained even after receiving their teaching certificate through a special program in which teacher studied in their villages and attended mandatory professional development training sessions and area training meetings” (p. 508). Despite the best efforts, the challenge to bring Native educators into the classrooms remains.

In a survey reported by Alston and Trujilo (2005), Native American educators identified possible improvements that would help them be better prepared. They indicated that content and pedagogical style should be delivered in a way that is culturally congruent for students. They further valued the curricular integration of "cultural values, beliefs, and local knowledge" as well as bilingual approaches for teaching Native languages. They felt that more time and resources should be allocated to better understanding the effects of parent involvement, authentic assessments, and teaching strategies congruent with Native learning styles. They further advocated that Native faculty should be available to mentor both student teachers and new teachers throughout their first year of teaching (Alston & Trujillo, 2005, p. 15). However, because “culturally responsive approaches to teaching go against social and political forces,” teachers do not “advance culturally relevant approaches to instruction in an uncontested manner” (Quicho & Rios, 2000, p. 512).

Teacher preparation efforts are not limited to the preparation of Native teachers; non-Native teachers benefit greatly from teacher in-services and professional development, for
example, that prepares them for the cultural differences present between themselves and the
Native students and communities they work with. Alston & Trujillo (2005) mention the creation
of a semester-long course for educators in the Southwest region of Alaska on cultural processes
of the Yup'ik Alaska Native groups, which was meant to help both Native and non-Native
participants "become more proficient in their dealings with the Alaska Native students they
teach" (p. 16). This example was given by Alston and Trujillo to show how professional
development could prepare educators culturally for instructing a classroom of predominantly
Alaska Native students.

*School and Community Relationship*

Another crucial consideration in any Native language and culture maintenance program is
the involvement of the community in educational efforts. Alston and Trujillo (2005) advocate
building a strong connection between home and school by involving parents and engaging the
entire family in the education of their children. In this way the community can build its trust in
the school and build a cooperative relationship between schools and communities. Such a
relationship is beneficial to students in improving their motivation, attendance, graduation rates,
and achievement.

As mentioned previously, Native communities are rarely unanimous in their desire for
school-based language and culture programs. Lipka and McCarty (1994) found that "indigenous
communities, like others, are not monolithic social or political entities" (p. 279). Though
community members may have conflicting views on the degree to which Indigenous knowledge
should be included in the public schools’ curriculum, "educators, community members, and
elders appear to be interested in evolving indigenous cultural forms and the role that a
reinvigorated Yup'ik or Navajo culture can play in schooling" (Lipka & McCarty, 1994, p. 280).
This is evident in the efforts of the Ciulistet group which, in 1992, consulted with Native elders for cultural information to use in school curriculum (Lipka & McCarty). The Ciulistet group has also been able to generate curriculum and pedagogy that meet the standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. This was accomplished by educators and elders “working together, slowly and deliberately, to craft such traditional Yup'ik ways as song, dance, and drumming which translate into hands-on manipulative approaches to the teaching of mathematics” (Lipka & McCarty, 1994, p. 276). For example a group of female educators from the Ciulistet group and elders collaborated to create an authentic song and dance that was to be used as a tool in teaching the Yup'ik number system, which uses a base 20 instead of the Western base ten.

In general, schools accomplish greater success with Alaska Native and American Indian students when they create in-school situations for a student’s entire family that are “positive, welcoming, and responsive to their needs” and which also encourage reciprocal communication between the school and the home as well as the school and the community. In this way, some schools are “redefining themselves as community learning centers that offer educational, social, and recreational activities to adults, as well as to children, and that reach out to community constituencies to support their involvement” (Alston & Trujillo, 2005, p. 16). The significance of such a community center role in a rural Alaskan village is undeniable and is a framework in which educational policy is implemented.

Educational Policy Implementation

Given the mandates of NCLB and the dynamics and composition of Rural Alaska Native communities, school district administrators are responsible for both implementing the higher-level government policy, and simultaneously working to accommodate the needs of the local
community. What Jester (2005) calls the “rational approach to educational reform” holds a prominent place in the policy making arena, by assuming that “policymakers identify a problem, develop or borrow a policy to solve the problem, solicit stakeholders' support for the policy, and expect practitioners to implement the policy in predictable ways with predictable outcomes" (p. 862). This was the probable case, for example with The Title I program, aid to the disadvantaged, which did not come about due to public demand. Furthermore, it was neither a product of the established educational organizations or educational administrators, nor was it a natural outgrowth of tried and tested programs at the local level (Murphy, 1991, p. 15). Rather, policy makers identified a problem—lack of aid to the disadvantaged—and developed a policy to solve the problem. "State political leaders and the business community had designed education reforms with little input from the education community" (Odden, 1991, p. 3). Not only does this reinforce the bold presence of the “rational approach” to education reform, but because it had not involved educators in the process, it also hints at a disconnect and possible tension between the policy makers and the policy implementers.

In the same vein, NCLB was developed by policy makers as a solution that would remedy the achievement gap among US students. In both the ESEA and NCLB cases, the “rational approach” to educational reform is challenged by "multiple factors that play out in the policy process, a process situated in a local context and replete with politics, contestation, and diverse, uncertain effects" (Jester, 2005, p. 862). The local context of Native communities are no exception and have the added dimension of the local debate of inclusion or exclusion of Native knowledge in the curriculum. Therefore, the implementation process of educational policy exhibits mutual adaptation between local and higher level government actors, that can touch on all aspects of a school system, including school-based Native culture and language programs.
Odden (1991) identifies three stages to educational policy implementation. Initially, state and federal government meet resistance and lack of interest from the policy implementers in the school districts, as there is “inevitable conflict between local orientations, values, and priorities and state or federally initiated programs” (Odden, p. 5). Stage two is characterized by mutual adaptation between higher-level government and the policy implementers. He also mentions the difference between developmental and redistributive programs. Developmental programs are those that are reinforcing local initiatives, and therefore encounter more willingness by local actors for implementation. Redistributive programs are those which force “local governments – school districts in the case of education – to engage in activities in which they had not been involved and to provide more services to some clients – students – than to others” (p. 7). Redistributive programs experience initial contentious implementation period, but through the process of mutual adaption, (which involves both “internal professional expertise and an external political support structure”) programs get fully implemented. In stage three, the program is fully implemented, but may not be having the desired effect. So during this phase, focus is on how to make the implemented program(s) work.

While Odden discusses policy implementation in regards to the ESEA, these phase identifications can be applied to the implementation of NCLB. Enacted in 2002, this legislation has been in effect for nearly ten years and its reauthorization is looming. Given the phases that Odden uses to explain the implementation process of the ESEA, we have yet to see the full implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. Odden’s phases are useful in identifying where the rural Alaska school district of this case study is in the implementation process of NCLB. Equally important is to consider how district administrators are navigating current policy implementation, what is being negotiated in the mutual adaptation process and how programs are
changing as a result. Understanding implementation can best be achieved "by viewing key administrators at the federal, state, and local level as primarily political figures—rather than educators—subject to the demands of their constituencies and to the constraints of their bureaucracies" (Murphy, 1991, p. 13).

How does educational policy implementation get put into effect in a dynamic socio-cultural context, like that of Alaska Natives? Jester gives an example in his case study of how this implementation occurred in a rural school district in Alaska, and the education transfer that occurred as a result. Prior to NCLB, the Tikishla School District began implementing its own standards-based curriculum, which was backed by the Alaska state standards established in the 1990s and included ten content areas in the developed curriculum continuum. (Jester, 2005) writes:

In 1993, Alaska followed the national trend toward standards-based education by developing content and performance standards in 10 content areas. In 1997, the states legislature mandated benchmark exams for students in grades 3, 6, and 8 and the High School Qualifying Exam that students must pass to receive a high school diploma. The state also established a school designating system that labels and ranks schools according to their scores on standardized exams and the state's tests (Jester, p. 865).

In many ways, this is a precursor to the mandates found in the No Child Left Behind Act.

In the process of partnering with "business leaders, community members, and school district professional personnel," the district conducted town meetings to "elicit community members' input" (Jester, 2005, p. 873). The administrators’ decision to included stakeholders in the reform process was vital in “establishing a symbolic shared vision construct that established
an arena in which the superintendent promoted his educational vision ... while providing the appearance of a census-driven process.” Furthermore, “the superintendent borrowed the discourse of standards-based education as a legitimation strategy for responding to potential parental contestation and promoting his educational vision” (Jester, 2005, p. 884). This illustrates the fine/delicate dynamics of local politics that influence reform implementation. Not only are school districts dealing with the dynamics of the local community, but they also deal with the dynamics and agendas of individual district personnel. In the Tikishla example, the shared-vision construct meant at least officially that "stakeholders had developed the reform through a democratic, consensus process and were therefore supportive of the resultant policies, practices, and underlying philosophical orientation" while unofficially, the superintendent "positioned himself as the principle designer" (Jester, 2005, p. 874). Just as Jester mentions that "the importation of standards-based education [in Tikishla School District] occurred within the broader context of the transcultural and postcolonial context of Alaska Native education" (p. 865) so too does the implementation of standards-based/NCLB educational policy in all predominantly Alaska Native schools occur within this broader context.

Education for Native Americans since the is one that at it’s earliest phase pushed an assimilative agenda through English-only policies in schools and separating children from families and communities with the boarding schools, sometimes forcibly removing them. These practices changed in the 1960s due to the Civil Rights movement and resulting legislation that addressed Native Americans and bilingual education. Significant legislation specific to Alaska Natives were the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the settlement of the Tobeluk v. Lind case. The social shifts occurring as a result of the civil rights movement led to a expansion of the space that Native Americans were able to exert self-determination in education.
Although education has visibly changed for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the last two centuries and there has been increased local Native control of schools and possibilities for school-based Native language programs, the self-determination available to Native Americans is still limited. Native communities and school districts, while recognized as having a special status, are still expected to implement federal education mandates. Educational policies, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, simultaneously encourage language programs, while restricting their possibilities and potential and provide a challenging relationship of asserting self-determination and meeting higher-level government mandates.
CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY

In this research, document analysis through a bounded case study addresses the primary research question: how has the district featured in the case study been negotiating its position of needing both to implement higher-level educational policy, as well as to accommodate the local community? This research further aimed to find out more specifically to what extent the district’s actions to develop the Indigenous language program are a result of educational legislation, primarily NCLB, and, conversely, to what extent educational legislation seems to complicate the district’s efforts to develop the Yup’ik language program.

Researcher Perspective

The implementation process of educational policy in Native American communities is one that must take into consideration the history of colonization and assimilative policies that have influenced and continue to influence Indigenous peoples and communities. I additionally recognize that current efforts to secure more Indigenous self-determination in education is inherent in a decolonization process. Though self-determination in education is handled differently in different Indigenous communities, involvement in and control of the education provided to their children is a valuable part of the movement of Indigenous self-determination. Furthermore, I place great value on the instructional inclusion of Native language and culture, which generally is supported in the Native American community. As a researcher with no Native heritage, I view that my role is to responsibly and accurately convey my findings, with the hope that it will provide useful information about this policy implementation process and perhaps its effects on school-based Native language and culture maintenance programs.
Conceptual Framework

Using these themes assist in examining the relationships the school district works within and capture the specific dynamics that are at play. To do this, an instrumental case study is the most appropriate research design to analyze the role of the Rural Tundra School District as a mediator between standards and regulations from the state and the local Indigenous community it serves. In an instrumental case study, according to Creswell (2007), “the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue” (p. 74). Creswell further clarifies that a case “has boundaries, often bounded by time and place. It also has interrelated parts” that makes the case both “bounded” and a system (2007, p. 244). This research, being a single intrinsic case study of one school district, is focusing on a single bounded system. This allows for more concentration on the specific issue of language policy and the local school-based language program. The particular system the research focuses on is that of the school district in an Indigenous rural setting. It is bounded firstly, and most generally, by the frameworks within which it functions, namely the state of Alaska and the Indigenous Yup’ik community. There are also temporal boundaries to this study, between the years 2004 through 2009, which are within the recent years after the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, making up a little over five complete academic years.

The research uses primarily an inductive conceptual framework. The data, specifically district departmental reports and communications within and from the district, determine the study’s focus. The point of this research was not to test a theory or to fundamentally apply an already existing framework to the situation in the Rural Tundra School District. Rather, it is to present an in depth account of the district in its context, and from that find theory that resonates
with the findings. Of course, to some extent this does require the application of a certain amount of deductive reasoning.

Case Description

As previously mentioned, the single case used for this research is a school district of rural southwest Alaska. For purposes of anonymity, I have changed the actual name of the district to the Rural Tundra School District. This district has a Native Alaskan majority, with 80.6 percent of the population identifies as Alaska Native in the 2000 Census. In most of the villages of the district, the Indigenous Alaska Native population makes up of a solid majority of the region’s population. While the most populated city in the region where the district office is located has a more predominant European American majority than surrounding villages, the rural villages have an average Alaska Native population of around 95 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

To understand the work of the district office and the district board, it is important to understand the specific setup of the district. The district office, where the board usually holds their meetings, and where the superintendent’s office and other departmental offices are, is located in the region’s most populous city, referred to here as the regional center. As of 2000, this regional center had a population 5,471 people.

Approximately twenty of the district’s schools are located in surrounding villages. In contrast to schooling in the regional center, village communities tend to have around three-hundred to five-hundred inhabitants, and school buildings usually house all grade levels. Schooling in the regional center is an anomaly from the schooling in the district’s surrounding villages. In the rural regional center, there are more educational options, including a Yup’ik language immersion elementary charter school or the English language elementary school, and two vocational alternative schooling options. It should be noted though that one of these
vocational schools is set up as an alternative boarding school, which may be attended by individuals from outside of the regional center. Also, the population in the regional center allows for a separate middle school and a separate high school.

Each village school in the district has its own local school board, whose roles shifted and went through some standardization efforts during the course of the five years I analyzed. Each school in the district also has a site administrator, which is essentially a school principal. Given the small size of the community in villages, site administrators have close relationships with the students and communities. Though not officially tied to the schools or district, the traditional village councils are a significant part of the local village community and involved to varying extent in the school’s role in the communities and the communities’ role in the school.

The dynamics and forces at work in the Rural Tundra School district were analyzed through the analysis of documents presented to the district board for their meetings from October 2004 until December 2009. As publicly-accessible documents created for elected officials, the names of individuals in the district have been omitted, to further insure anonymity. Also, all data from the Board packets contain an “official view” on issues related to Rural Tundra. This official discourse does not usually give explicit insights about dynamics “behind the scenes,” but such dynamics may be indicated or inferred. In addition to the district’s board packets, curricula, other district-produced material, and references to the NCLB Act, there is also occasionally reference to the imposed standards and mandates from the State of Alaska. I do this to portray more fully the relationship at play between the state and districts in the implementation process of educational policy. It specifically shows how state driven educational policy is also language policy in its implications on bilingual education and education rights for the Yup'ik speaking
communities of the Southwest Alaska and how these state mandates are reflected in the local board reports.

Case Selection

There are multiple reasons for choosing this particular district. First, there was the convenience of working as an intern at the district office in the early summer of 2009. Having spent six weeks in the district office, I became familiar with and took part in some of the work there. Not only did this give me a basic understanding of the region, culture, and the inner-workings of the school district itself, but it was this experience that made me aware of the politics and complexities of developing language programs and curriculum and maintaining them. Being familiar with the multidimensional context of the area, and interacting and engaging with the community has given me valuable insights that are helpful in affirming much of the information found in the data.

Second, the Rural Tundra School District deals with some of the issues surrounding language policy in education, specifically the complex relationship among school-based Indigenous language efforts and local and state dynamics that influence education and curriculum. While the research is primarily inductive in that the themes emerged from the data, there was a certain deductive aspect in the selection of this case. This school district seemed to be working within a framework of local-national dichotomies that would potentially resonate with related literature on Indigenous education, school-based programs and policy implementation.

While the dynamics involved in school-based Indigenous language programs might be brought to light in a number of cases throughout the United States, each case is unique and inevitably bound to its sociocultural context. While its particular sociocultural makeup makes the
Rural Tundra School District an ideal choice to focus on Indigenous language programs and educational policy in an Alaskan context, it does limit the generalizability of findings to other contexts.

Due to the specific characteristics of the Rural Tundra School District and its context, recommendations given in this particular case may be inapplicable in other school settings. Even within the United States, the contexts within which those schools serving an Indigenous majority operate are often quite distinct from one another. This is most definitely the case with the Rural Tundra School District. Due firstly to the uniqueness of the Alaskan context—which distinguishes itself from "similar" contexts in the lower forty-eight states both geographically, historically, and socioculturally—the Rural Tundra district's context differs from potential counterparts in other areas. Even within the state of Alaska, Indigenous groups that Alaska's school systems serve are diverse in their cultural practices, the extent to which they practice their traditional cultures, as well as the extent to which their native language is used. The Rural Tundra School District serves a population that is primarily Yup'ik Alaska Native, a group that has relatively strong native language usage. As mentioned previously in the review of literature, of the 20 native languages in Alaska, only two continue to be passed down "naturally" from parents to children (Bernhardt, 2001). One of these two is Central Yup'ik, the language of the Yup'ik majority of the Rural Tundra School District. This fact brings up an important point about language maintenance versus language revitalization. The fact that the Rural Tundra School district’s language program deals with maintenance, distinguishes it from other district programs within the state. While the unique context of the district perhaps makes findings in this thesis inapplicable to other studies, it does provide a comprehensive understanding about how the dynamics in this type of context play out. However, insights gained from the district and its
language maintenance efforts may be valuable to other American Indian tribes that are dealing with language maintenance versus language revitalization.

Although the results and recommendations of this research will not be fully generalizable, generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007, p. 76). Furthermore, by identifying only one case in this study, and conducting an embedded analysis, this research can provide an in-depth understanding of the case, which may include the chronology of events, pertaining to the case. Beyond description, case study research is able to focus on key themes that emerge. These themes are “not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case” (Creswell, p. 76). Thus, this case study will be able to inform understanding on the complexity of the Rural Tundra School District through the themes emergent from the documents.

Data Selection

To critically assess the Rural Tundra School District, the primary data source was the district Board meeting packets. Each full Board packet contains the minutes from the previous meeting; as well as any correspondence the district office has received, both from its schools, the surrounding community, and state or federal agencies. It also includes reports made to the Board by the departments within the district office, including departments such as Academic Programs and Support, Social Work, and Personnel and Student Services. The documents of the board packets contain explicit and implicit information about the district, its relationship with the State of Alaska, as well as its relationship with the federal government, and how both these relationships are central to the Yup'ik language program in the district's schools as well as other programs in the community.
This study focuses on the Yup’ik language program and language maintenance efforts, as well as other district initiatives, since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. For this reason, document analysis focuses on documents produced after NCLB authorized by the U.S. Congress in 2002 (Bush 2002). This study begins with Board documents from October 2004, two years after NCLB was passed. The reason for choosing this date as the beginning boundary of the study was due primarily to a convenience factor: only Board document packets from this date on were available to me.

By using the Board packets, we can analyze the same information that the Rural Tundra School Board used for discussion and decision-making. The board packets are thus a valuable account of district issues and actions. Furthermore, Merriam (1998) comments that a great advantage of using documented material is its stability. There is no presence of an investigator which may alter the behaviors or responses of participants. Also, document analysis is often referred to as unobtrusive and does not rely on reactivity (Meriam, 1998, p. 126).

There is also value in collecting data from a variety of sources (Creswell, 2007; Connelly, 2000). Connelly (2000) mentions that letters, conversations, field notes, and documents are some of the varying sources from which researchers can collect data. While this research is primarily a document analysis, the range of documents analyzed vary. By containing letters and correspondences, reports to the board, comments from the board, and the final decisions made by the board, the board packets actually include various sources of information. In addition, my own observations and field notes were documented in a research journal, which was another source of data utilized.
Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, I have kept a research journal. While in Alaska, the journal was used mostly as a place to record any observations and to reflect on them. As the research continued, the focus of my research journal shifted to a place for memoing. Memos included reflections on pertinent literature and insights on the themes encountered from analyzing and coding the district documents. A place to reflect on my topic and any issues or questions that arose, this journal also served as a “record of analysis” which is helpful in the formation of theory (Creswell, 2007, p. 239; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While I was not forming theory, it did help in understanding the complexities of the case studied and what theories might be applicable to it.

Actual document analysis began with reading through several board reports to gain a sense of how information was presented, and what topics were prevalent. This was followed by coding all school board meeting packets, making special notes about information pertinent to the scope of this research. I reviewed carefully and coded those documents that are especially applicable.

The coding of these documents involved two tiers of analysis. In the first tier I identified major themes, most of which I explicitly stated. As stated earlier, these include roles and relationships in the district’s governance, policy implementation efforts, infrastructural issues, and teacher issues. In the second tier, I was observant of implicit emergent themes. By scanning and saving all board packet documents as rtf files, it was possible to use the computer program Text Analysis Markup System (TAMS) in the coding process. As Creswell (2007) points out, it is the researcher, not the computer program that does the coding and categorizing. TAMS facilitated in the coding process by allowing easy access to codes, which allowed for a quick
simple method of documenting and later interpreting themes, as well as the context in which they were presented. TAMS was extremely beneficial in this regard, since the number pages of documents to be coded and analyzed were extensive.

From these district documents crucial themes emerged. These themes fundamentally relate to mandates the district must comply with, standards and guidelines, and also local pressures to make district programs work and be meaningful in the immediate community. Through the course of analyzing the district documents, I realized there are various policies simultaneously in effect in the region. Those policies exhibit how the district board and administrators are navigating a complex system. Their position between federal and state funding and educational mandates and local concerns and issues must be taken into consideration in order to make the implementation of any policy effective and appropriate. Within this relational context of authority and power, other underlying infrastructural and economical realities emerged that deeply influence the district’s actions. Decisions that are made which relate to my research question are not isolated affairs; in this specific context, all services related to education are influential parts in how the district is able to function. Particular themes including the roles and relationships in the district’s governance, policy implementation efforts, infrastructural issues, and teacher issues are all part of the web of influencing factors in the district.

Validity

Steps taken to insure validity in this case study, included utilizing as much various data as possible and debriefing with outsiders about the research process. Unfortunately, given my brief six-week stay in the district, which was at the end of the academic year, it was unrealistic to plan interviews and extensive observations on top of any duties and responsibilities as an intern. I was able to observe some Yup'ik classrooms in action, a language planning meeting in a village, and
I experienced during my short stay the daily work within the district office itself. Although limited, these observations and experiences are valuable in confirming data from the documents. Furthermore, the documents contained in the board packets are compiled from various sources. The various sources of the documents analyzed, coupled with my own conversations, experiences, and observations in the district are helpful in corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2007). In this way, the results are triangulated. Furthermore, peer debriefing provides an external check on the research process (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). To further insure validity, peer debriefing over coding procedures and interpretation of data occurred.

Taking into consideration concerns with validity as well as establishing the scope and boundaries of this case study are important steps in the research process. They allow for an accurate and focused portrayal of the complexities of the Rural Tundra School District regarding the relationship’s between educational policy implementation, the programs and curricula of the district, and the extent of Indigenous self-determination in the district’s educational system.
CHAPTER III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the documents analyzed, multiple actors, issues, and themes affecting the local curriculum and implementation are apparent. More specifically, they address the central question: how has the district been negotiating its position of needing both to implement higher-level educational policy as well as accommodate the local Native community. The most significant themes include: 1) the roles and relationships in the district; 2) the process of implementing state and federal policy; 3) physical and social infrastructural issues; and 4) teacher turnover, retention, and certification issues. These four themes illustrate how the district is navigating its actions, which influence the education they provide.

The primary district actor considered here is the School Board, which holds some authority in the district, but is largely absent from the actual planning of curriculum and programs. Other actors, primarily the district departments and the superintendent, also play significant roles in planning and promoting the curriculum and programs. The process of implementing federal, state, and district-originated policies exhibited a tendency, at some points, to limit Native self-determination in education. Yet at other points the process also led to a tendency of expanding local self-determination exhibited in the bilingual program planning. Physical infrastructural issues such as water and sewage facilities, securing fuel and power for facilities, and maintenance issues, coupled with social infrastructural issues such as social work and a common space for community gatherings, are supported and sustained largely by the Rural Tundra School District, and create significant financial challenges. The high teacher turnover rate in the district explains the efforts to retain teachers through a mix of infrastructural improvements, as well as efforts to increase the local Native teaching base. In this chapter, the
impact of these themes are presented first with supporting evidence from the board documents. This is followed by a discussion of the themes in relation to research literature.

Evidence of Themes from Data

The following section is devoted to providing a clear developed depiction of the four major themes. To do this I give direct examples and citations from the documents analyzed.

The Influence of Roles and Relationships

The relationships that various entities in the district have in relation with one another as well as the roles that each perform make up the district governance system of the Rural Tundra School District. Here I explain that the school board, district departments, and the superintendent are the most influential entities of this system and help to inform understanding of the extent of Native self-determination in this school system.

School Board

Analysis of the school board documents revealed the central importance of the District Board of Education for the Rural Tundra School District. While school board meetings in many parts of the country may only last a few hours, board meetings in the Rural Tundra School District last between one and two days. There are a number of issues that the board must consider, not all of which are purely academic. The length of board meetings themselves indicated the amount of material that the board was responsible for reviewing and considering. The time devoted to board meetings, points to the district school board as a public office that seems to be taken seriously by members and the community.

The Board makes the final system-level decisions in the district as well as decisions regarding individual students. These decisions include approving spending, creating the fiscal budget for each school year, and hiring the superintendent. These decisions affect the entire
district. The board also holds final authority on student disciplinary and academic affairs, such as expulsions, readmittance and petitions to graduate early.

**Requesting information.**

Although the board does not decide directly on details of programs including curriculum and services to students, they maintain indirect influence through their authority over the superintendent, who acts as the administrative head of the district and oversees the district’s departments. From the documents, it is clear that departments not only presented reports to the board, but the board also could and did request information. In the following three examples, we see the board requesting information regarding truancy, the implementation of NCLB in the district, and specific information regarding the AYP of specific schools.

Truancy was an issue of regular discussion at board meetings. At the October 2006 district board meeting minutes, it was noted that a board member “commented on the truancy and drop report. She would like this report to be a routine report at each board meeting.” This report was provided at the following December and January meetings. However, between the March 2007 and the August 2008 meetings, a truancy report was provided only once. From October 2008 on, truancy reports were provided at eight of the nine meetings through 2009. Although the board members request was initially heeded, truancy reports were provided inconsistently and sporadically. Interestingly, it was the same board member who originally requested consistent truancy reports, who again at the August 2008 meeting requested these be provided at every meeting. This pattern of supplying the district board with information when requested shows how the school board and its role were perceived.

A similar example may be taken from the board’s request for information regarding the No Child Left Behind implementation in the district. In the October 2004 meeting minutes, it is
stated under discussed items that “The Board would like a report on No Child Left Behind at future meetings.” This, like the request for truancy reports, was not consistently reported to the Board. For the following three meetings after the request was made, the report was provided. However, in the 16 board meetings between April, 2005 and November 2007, NCLB reports were provided sporadically at seven of those meetings. From December 2007 until the end of the period analyzed no other reports specific to NCLB were presented at board meetings. It is not mentioned in any of the meeting minutes if district board members commented further on the lack of NCLB reports provided. Presumably, as there was no mention of it in the minutes, the district board over time lost the earlier sense of urgency of having an NCLB report at every meeting. This points to other possible driving forces that are part of the process of policy implementation that influenced how information in the district was communicated.

Information regarding Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), a specific element of NCLB, was also requested by the board at the August 24, 2007 meeting. At this meeting, a district board member said that she wanted, “a report on the AYP for all our schools.” Most likely this was provided to the board in some form. However, it was never presented in the documents as its own report, which addressed specifically AYP throughout the district. Presumably, this information was provided in individual school reports to the district board. These reports were often given via two-way video, and usually in the board meeting packet no documents are provided regarding the content of these reports. When documents from an individual school site’s report were included, they would always address their schools AYP and improvement status as it applied. Still, it is difficult to know if schools reported this because a district board member had requested it, or whether there were other forces, such as community pressure or district pressure that prompted them to do so.
These examples indicate that the board members were anything but complacent about their role. They put effort into establishing their position as more than a symbolic one, and one that functioned as more than just a ritualized final approval of district initiatives. The board’s push to be informed perhaps steered the departments of the district in the direction of their work. Even though it is the district departments that decide the details of the curriculum and programs, their focus was possibly influenced by the interaction with and requests from the board. In this way the Board was bringing district attention to the issues of concern to their constituencies.

Fulfilling their role as a community link.

Board as a community link.

The district board was a link between the village parents and schools, and the district office in the regional center, where most board meetings are held. The members of the district board were elected to represent the village communities, and answer to their constituencies. At meetings, the board members also voiced their individual concerns about what is going on in the district, both from what they have been presented with in the meeting as well as information or concerns they come to the meeting with. Board members occasionally mentioned other sources for their statements in meetings. For example, in the minutes for the April 2006 meeting, a board member “stated that she received a call from … a parent wanted to know how they could get rid of phases in their schools.” This illustrates how board members were seen as individuals to contact regarding questions and concerns about policy being implemented, as well as other concerns.

The board also made efforts to be in contact with the village communities. For example, the October 2005 meeting minutes, includes the following about a new board member:
He has talked to all of the [regional center’s] principals and he is happy to report that they are all getting off to a good start. He asked all the principals about phases. For the most part elementary principals say that they are making it work. They all say that there are way too many indicators and that the paperwork demand for phases is very challenging. …He hopes we can improve that.

Additionally, the board occasionally made efforts to hold board meeting in village locations outside of the regional center. This was first brought up at the December 2005 meeting when the board discussed having the Rural Tundra School District Board meetings in villages, and at the same meeting voted unanimously to hold the next meeting in a particular village in the district. Board members decided again at the January 2006 meeting to hold the April 2006 meeting in another village in the district. At the March 2007 meeting, the district board recommended that one of its own members attend the local school board meeting in a particular village to address the possibility of holding a future board meeting in that village.

In dealing with the NCLB implementation, the April 2005 report indicated the following about a board member, “one of his concerns is the communication between the villages that are level four. How can we fix this issue with communication? We have to become a family in order to be a success.” This speaks strongly to the board’s perceived role of facilitating communication within the district. Also, it points to the Board’s concern about NCLB by specifically mentioning level four schools. Consulting with the communities and being a presence in localities throughout the district is a reoccurring theme at board meetings. These concerns with the limitations and challenges in communication indicate a factor that affects policy implementation.
Despite its role as a presence and a link throughout the region and its involvement in the work of the district departments, the Rural Tundra School District Board seems to have limited self-determination in their area’s education. As mentioned previously, the Board requests information and is presented information from the district’s Departments, but appear to have very limited control over the development and implementation of curriculum and programs.

District Departments

While the district board must approve decisions made in the district, especially those pertaining to spending, the board reports suggest that the departments within the district office decide the specifics of the curriculum and other programs. They do, however, take the concerns voiced by the board into consideration, and they must report at least annually if not more frequently to the board about the initiatives in their department. Through the reports to the board, and in turn the board’s comments and discussions about district initiatives, there was a form of consistent communication occurring between these two entities. However it was the departments that really work out the particulars of the curriculum and other programs.

The various departments within the district are housed in the district office of the rural regional center. These departments underwent some shifts and changes during the time period that I analyzed, but the main departments were the Department of Academic Programs, the Department of Personnel and Student Services, the Office of the Superintendent, the Office of Social Work, and the Safety Office. These departments would give periodic reports to the board ranging from reporting annually to reporting at each board meeting. The fluctuation of the frequency of reports these departments gave reflected to a large degree the most prominent areas of concern in the district at certain times during the five years analyzed.
The recent initiative to restructure the bilingual program is an example of where departments’ planning and expertise are used to significantly influence a district program. In its June 2009 report, the Department of Academic Programs provides in detail to the board the actions that are already underway to begin restructuring the bilingual education program. It is this department that is making the decisions regarding how to initiate the language planning process in villages. While the board has little control over how this initiative is going once it is in progress, in this particular case, it is the individual communities that are deciding the course their bilingual program should take. However, the Department of Academic Programs did make the call to curtail the practice of pulling non-English language proficient students during class time, and instead instituted a State approved approach where English language instruction is embedded throughout the curriculum. It is this department that uses its expertise to make decisions that are reported to the board.

Superintendent

During the span of time observed for this case study the superintendent changed once. The superintendent who served until the end of the 2007-2008 school year retired, and the new superintendent took over for the remaining time of the research period. These two individuals who occupied this position seem to have had slightly different approaches to their work. The superintendent of the Rural Tundra School District works as the top administrator in the district and communicator to higher-level government officials, including to both state and federal officials, about all issues affecting the district. As the highest administrator in the district, the superintendent oversees the departments of the district office. He is essentially entrusted with the departments of the district.
The superintendent’s report is included in every board packet. A few pages in length, it reads as a narrative overview of the most prominent and crucial issues in the district along with his own reflections and opinions. What these reports mention or fail to mention sends an implicit message as to the intentions of the district as a whole. Additionally, the handover of the superintendent position toward the end of the time analyzed indicates the degree to which this one individual has a voice in the district. The first superintendent who was in office tended to include and reiterate certain themes, which the following superintendent did not, or at least not to the same extent. In relation to educational policy implementation, the major themes found in the superintendent’s reports were accountability and cohesion.

*Superintendent’s theme of accountability and cohesion*

The superintendent made numerous comments regarding accountability. In contrast to NCLB’s quantitative assessment of accountability, the superintendent is using the language of NCLB to talk back to the policy. In addition, these statements often seem to encourage a sense of cohesion through a common mission of educating the district’s students. For example, in March 2005, he wrote in his report:

The educational family: students, parents, community members and teachers, are accountable for our children's future. No one member of the educational family can be held responsible for the failure and/or success of a student or group of students; each member of the educational family plays an important part in the success of our students. It is this team effort that will guide our students in achieving their goals. In the past eight years the district has made great strides in student achievement. This could not have happened without the collaborative effort of those in the educational family. However, great challenges lie before us
and if we want our students to be successful, the educational family cannot be
passive or apathetic in our efforts to help our students succeed. Our students are
very capable of meeting these challenges and with everyone's involvement they
can be successful.

In other instances, the superintendent seemed to be voicing frustration over the accountability
issue. For example in a later report from June 2006, he began his report with a quote from John
Henry Fisher, “A school free to concentrate on those services that only schools can give is in a
position to do more effective teaching than one that must be all things to all children and to their
parents, too.” Though this statement may not have been intended to be scrutinized for meaning,
it is noteworthy that he has chosen in this example a quote that may be pointing to
accountability, and specifically pointing a finger at parents. He further supported his claim by
stating in his own words, “Our students' success is the results of everyone working together. In
today's world the old saying, ‘It takes an entire village (community) to raise a child’ no truer
words could be spoken.” Such comments by the superintendent indicate a high level of discourse
on the topic of accountability throughout the district, and one that was perhaps incorporated in
the bilingual program planning that was initiated in the later part of this research period.

As mentioned previously, both superintendents also encouraged a sense of cohesion in
their reports. The implicit statements regarding cohesion are especially prevalent in the reports
from the first superintendent. His statements seem to encourage cohesion as a tool to encourage
educational policy implementation. In his report from October 2006, he comments:

I think the re-election of all five Board members is a strong indication that the communities
in our District are satisfied with the direction the District Board has given in meeting the
educational needs of all of our students. The Board and District has been faced with
multiple challenges and the Board has provided the administration with the necessary
guidance to meet these challenges and to do what's best for all of our students. The re-
election of our Board Members will add the continuity needed to continue in the direction
we have been going.

Here the superintendent’s comments assume a sense of cohesion among the district actors in how
they worked together to overcome challenges, but also he promotes the sense that the lay people
of the district are also supportive of the efforts and direction taken by the district. In a mix of
accountability and cohesion, the same superintendent comments in January 2008, “As we seek
new and better ways to meet the needs of our students, ‘we’, all of us, will need to continue
working as the educational family (team) if our children are to be successful.” Statements such as
this one were common in the majority of the superintendent’s reports, and often seem to be an
effort to unify the district on policy implementation initiatives. Although in this instance the
superintendent doesn’t mention specifically which initiative or policy he is referring to, he does
in the same report discuss the aggressive State and federal legislation including NCLB.

Interestingly, there is little mention of the distinct linguistic and cultural heritage of the
majority of the students in the district. While the second superintendent does address the
language and culture of the students in his reports to some extent. The first superintendent makes
virtually no mention of this. There is only one report from June 2007 in which this
superintendent specifically mentions the linguistic and cultural challenge that students face:

Not all of our successes are concrete (something you see) but many are from within, self-
respect, pride, and self-worth. Our students face the challenge of weaving together their
cultural issues, language and subsistence activities, into and with an economic based
lifestyle. For some it's as if they are walking a tight rope, on one side is their native
heritage and on the other the western world. The students' challenge is to be able to reap
the benefits of both. A quality education will enable them to do that.

Aside from this single comment in the June 2007 report the superintendent never mentions the
Yup’ik curriculum, or school-based language and cultural events. In contrast, the later
superintendent is involved in dialogues with the district and state that touch on the language
considerations. He mentions twice in his March 2009 report language and new district initiatives
to address issues in the Yup’ik-English bilingual program. Also, in regards to a state preschool
pilot program committee he was a part of, this superintendent reported recommending, “building
programs that are coordinated with the K-12 curriculum, including using the same language of
instruction that the kindergarten in that community uses.” These examples indicate an
understanding and concern of language issues.

The implicit messages conveyed by these two superintendents regarding the value and
place of Yup’ik curriculum in the district are significant. On one end there are messages of
cohesion, which seem to be emphasizing cooperation in implementing policy. At the other end,
there are reported efforts to address language issues that are hindering the effective
implementation of policy.

The Impact of Policy Implementation

Contrary to implementing NCLB mandates in isolation, the district was implementing a
myriad of policies simultaneously. These policies vary in their goals and motivation. While two
in particular originated outside the district, namely the NCLB legislation and the Alaska
Standards-based education legislation, other district-originated policies were being implemented,
to some extent in response to the mandates from higher-level government. The most prominent
district originated programs include the curriculum policy change, often referred to as the “phase system”.

The District Board of Education was also a voice (at least officially) in support of implementing the NCLB and Standards-based mandates. In their assumptions of the school budget, the school board officially states that “All expenditures will be made in conformance with the LKSD Goals and State Standards” which includes the stated district goals of understanding the Yup’ik/Cupi’k culture, traditions, beliefs, and way of knowing, as well as state standards which include the Alaska Content Standards, Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools and the "Quality School Initiative".

*No Child Left Behind*

Policy implementation themes included the programmatic responses from the NCLB Act. These were especially evident in the shifts in the curriculum content, and comments made concerning the highly qualified teaching staff mandate and the schools making annual yearly progress (AYP). In addition to the NCLB policy, there were other concurrent policies that the district was in the process of implementing. The Alaska Standards-Based Education Act initiated a significant shift in the organization of curriculum prior to the NCLB Act. In the Rural Tundra School District this entailed a change from a traditional grade-based curriculum, to one that is organized in phases within a certain grade level, and intended to ensure student mastery of one phase before moving to the next.

Concerning NCLB implementation, some stages of implementation, as defined by Odden (1991), are apparent. As mentioned previously, beginning in 2004, NCLB reports were sporadically presented at board meetings by the board’s request. These reports to the board from December 2004 and January 2005 all report that the district-formed monitoring teams would
work or had worked with schools, having an Annual Yearly Progress at a level 4 or 5 to assess school and district action to be taken. In 2005 there were eleven such schools in the district. Upon the monitoring teams completing their work, subsequent improvement plans were developed for each individual school. These improvement plans were completed in accordance with NCLB and submitted to the State, in a process that involved cooperation among level four and five schools’ site administrators, local school board representatives, and the district school board. The request for information by the board regarding NCLB in the district coupled with the effort to monitor and assess individual schools indicates an initial stage of NCLB implementation. However, the situation at Rural Tundra does not illustrate the strong resistance that Odden associates with the first stage of policy implementation. As of October 2004 Rural Tundra showed more concern about the new policy than resistance to implementing it. There are two reasons this might be the case. First, resistance to NCLB might have occurred prior to the time of the documents analyzed. Secondly, the combination of other policies being implemented altered the resistance toward NCLB. In other words, a preceding district initiative, namely the “phase system”, might have taken the brunt of voiced resistance. This district initiative will be discussed in a following section.

District improvement plan and the bilingual program.

In the December 2005 NCLB report to the board the district improvement plan is presented. The first goal stated in the plan is, “By the end of the 2005-06 school year, the proficiency rate in Reading/Language Arts will increase from 41% to 51%, and the proficiency rate in Math will increase from 38% to 48% on state assessments for students.” Listed second in a list of fourteen strategies to meet this goal is addressing the learning needs of Limited English Proficient (ELP) students:
Schools within the district will update their Language Development Programs to align with the research-based program designs as indicated by current state and federal guidelines. Each school will identify, with input of their community, the program type that best fits the needs of its students and community. Program model types include: Yupik Language Development Program (Developmental Bilingual Education model), Dual Immersion Program (Dual Language Program model), and the English Language Development Program (ESOL/SIOP model). Additionally, the needs of LEP students at all grade levels will be addressed through the research-based ESL/ELD program designed to address the English language development needs of LEP students in elementary grades, and the Sheltered English model (SIOP) in content classes in grades 7-12. All LEP activities will be in alignment with the new State ELD standards and GLEs plus full implementation of IPT testing K-12 will occur.

This shows that early on in the implementation, language was raised as an issue that was preventing the district from making its stated goals. Although there is specific mention of working with the Indigenous village communities to develop the language program, the stated goal is not the maintenance of Yup’ik language, but rather the mastery of English. The recognition here is that to perform well on NCLB assessments, English is a necessity. Despite the immediate recognition of language as a barrier to achieving the goals in the improvement plan, it wasn’t until 2007 that this area began to be addressed by the community and board, and this is an ongoing process in the district. Also, only in 2009 did the district adopt the Sheltered Instruction Operational Protocol (SIOP) throughout the district as a new approach to addressing the needs of LEP students.

A district initiative beginning in 2007 was focused on reviewing and revising the bilingual
program throughout the district. This may have been spurred by rising concerns about the benefit of the bilingual program as it was set up in village schools. In one particularly confrontational letter to the board in November 2007, a parent explains in detail her concerns about the bilingual program, as it exists in village schools. She states that:

When English was taught and students were identified by grade level, a student who was 11-12 years of age was considered a 6th grade junior high student. Now, those students are stuck in what is called a transition grade for 2-3 years trying to learn English. When they finally get to the junior high age, I'm sure their testing ability is that of a 3rd or 4th grader because at the transition level, they are learning K-3 level English.

There is much truth to her claim. In the case of her letter to the board she emphasizes her belief that English should be the language of instruction throughout school. This view of English-only instruction is far from unanimous in the district. However, her letter does point to the language factor that is preventing the effective implementation of policies in the district. The discourse beginning at this time over the bilingual program, points to a shift in the stages of policy implementation process toward a concern in making the implemented programs and initiatives effective.

The following comment from the superintendent in 2007 indicates a step back from the efforts to standardize curriculum according to NCLB and Standards-based policy and also reflects a shift in the policy implementation process:

As we enter the New Year and our students are starting their second semester of school we need to ask ourselves: Is the Rural Tundra School District’s educational program focusing on the whole child, or are we only trying to address their
academic needs? We recognize the academic challenges before us as the State and Federal governments continue to raise the academic expectations for all members in the educational family. All of us want our students to achieve these higher levels of expectations in reading, writing and math; we also want them to achieve this same level of success in science, social studies, and the other academic areas. But what about the child holistically, have we forgotten about the other 'half of the child, where are the fine arts (music, art, drama, and etc.), P.E., vocational education, and skills that develop the social / emotional well being of the student, are we leaving them behind and at what cost?

Interestingly, he does not mention specifically the Yup’ik language and culture curriculum and any significance they might have in addressing a child “holistically”. Still, whether or not the superintendent means here to refer to the linguistic and cultural heritage that makes up the “whole child,” it is nonetheless a recognition of the discourse that has occurred in the district regarding the implementation thus far and appears to be a form of mutual adaptation occurring in the space between higher level government mandates and the local district communities. Also his statement came at the same time that focus on the bilingual program was renewed, reflecting the shift of concerns in the district during this time.

In an April 2008 report from the Academic Programs and Support Department it was stated that, “Also under review are bilingual programs: YFL/YLD and ESL/ELD. Because bilingual programs are embedded in all instruction and cross all grade levels, review will take some time. Revised language programs are scheduled for beginning implementation fall 2009.” Furthermore, in January of 2009, the board unanimously voted to accept a partnership with faculty of the University of Alaska Fairbanks for language program planning and support. At this
time a concerted effort was initiated by the district to assess, adjust, and tailor the bilingual program. These efforts, at least in part, adhere to the district improvement plan. However, there is, most likely, other additional motivations driving the district in these efforts.

Highly qualified teacher mandate.

In an effort to improve the quality of school educators, the NCLB Act also includes a mandate requiring all teachers to be “highly qualified” by 2006. This entails having a full state teacher certification, a license to teach in the state, a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and demonstrating subject area competence in each of the academic subjects that a teacher instructs. The board states in their budget assumptions, included in the March 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 board packets, that, “Funds allocated to sites will be used for the implementation of the site's School Improvement Plan.” This improvement plan is referring to those individual school improvement plans that were created with the assistance of the monitoring teams and, like the district improvement plan, were sent to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to show how schools were going to comply with the NCLB mandates by improving their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). There was, then, at least stated evidence that the district was implementing NCLB at the school site level according to the improvement plans.

At the same time, the district began focusing on teacher certification in relation to the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) mandate of NCLB. HQT information specific to the Rural Valley School District was also presented in the NCLB reports from the end of 2004 on. This was an area of the NCLB legislation that was particularly difficult for the district to meet. This component of NCLB implementation received less initial heated debate about its implementation, and less opposition overall from community members. Nevertheless, there were frustrations indicated in the district due to the dependency the district had on the state in
certifying teachers. This, in turn, made meeting the original 2006 NCLB highly qualified deadline virtually impossible. Stuck between the federal and state government, the superintendent and district departments addresses these frustrations even as late as 2008 as in the October report that year from the Personnel and Student Services department:

The state's teacher certification process has become a very serious problem. After several months of struggling to get updated information, the Teacher Certification Department at EED acknowledged that they were substantially behind in their paperwork, and were unable to process teacher certification applications in a timely manner. This creates a significant amount of confusion and frustration for our teachers as they navigate this already complex course. Furthermore, it creates a situation where we are unable to meet our legal requirements to employ and contract teachers who hold an Alaska Teacher Certificate. As of the middle of October, it appears that they are now about caught up, and we are in contact with teachers who have not met certification requirements.

One year later, in his October 2009 report, the superintendent states that:

It is worthwhile to note that we have seen some improvement in the state's teacher certification process. The Teacher Certification Department at EED has implemented changes that have streamlined the certification process and drastically reduced their backlog. At this time last year, we had many teachers who had not yet had their certification status confirmed or denied.

From these excerpts it is apparent that the district is dependent on the state in order to begin to implement the Highly Qualified Teacher mandate. It is important to recognize the double relationship the district has toward higher-level governments as one that both mandates changes to be made and one that the district is dependent on in order to make those changes.
Teacher certification coupled with other stipulations to be considered a “highly qualified teacher” are time consuming and are a challenge to implement within in the time specified in the legislation. In the meantime, other measures were being taken to adhere to the NCLB mandate.

In 2006 the superintendent wrote in his report:

NCLB and AYP continue to force the district to chart a course that may require us to explore additional courses being taught via distance delivery. The deadline for districts to meet the NCLB requirements of having highly qualified teachers in every classroom is at the end of this year [2006]. However if districts are making a concerted effort the State can extended that date to 2008. We feel that with the current distant delivery classes in math and science we are making a concerted effort and I'm sure the State will agree. However if the highly qualified staff requirement continue and expands into other content areas we will need to increase our distant delivery classes.

Individual schools in the district reported using this option of distance learning. One school reported in April, 2009, “In order to have certain classes taught by highly qualified teachers, staff members at site are paired with highly qualified teachers from the district office. These classes are delivered via the two-way video system.” They further reported using this distance delivery method for Algebra, Geometry, and Applied Math at the high school level.

Although it temporarily it allows adherence to the Highly Qualified Teachers mandate of NCLB, the distance method of delivery is perhaps not the most optimal for student learning and not necessarily what was intended with the this tenet of NCLB. In testimony given to the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, in August 2009, the superintendent expressed this disparity, (though not directly addressing such distance learning):

The unrealistic requirements for "Highly Qualified" teachers are based on criteria that do
not represent most of the teacher qualities that lead to student success. In our district, there is actually a negative correlation between the percentage of NCLB Highly Qualified teachers and a school's success in meeting AYP. In our small schools, often one or two teachers teach all of the high school subjects. It is virtually impossible for them to be HQ in all subjects they teach. Let's build a system that bases "Highly Qualified" on those affective qualities that we know inspire and motivate students to learn.

In the above passage from his testimony, the superintendent is expressing the districts culminating frustrations with and reflections on the NCLB’s HQT mandate. Throughout this testimony, the superintendent is engaged in a national-local dialectic between the district and the federal government on specific concerns with the No Child Left Behind Act.

Alaska Standards-Based Education and the Phase System

The years 2004 through 2007 showed the most discussion of the district’s newly implemented phase system. In some form at every meeting during this time, the phase system was addressed. As previously mentioned, the district’s phase system refers to the shift from grade levels, to phase levels within a grade. Instead of focusing on passing a grade in school in the traditional sense, the phase system lays out sequential phases, each of which a student must demonstrate mastery before moving to the next. By aligning the phase levels to the Alaska grade level standards, the district is moving to implement the state policy. As a broad sweeping district reform, there was much community opposition and frustration with the new system, especially from teachers. Teachers voiced frustrations about trying to accommodate students at different phase levels in their classrooms. A report from the department of technology and media in January 2007, stated the following:
Many teachers have told us that they no longer have the time to take on extra curricular reading programs due to phase lesson planning and documentation. Participation in Battle of The Books demonstrated a drop by 50% in historical numbers when this methodology was introduced.

This clearly illustrates how teachers working to implement the phase system are having an effect on what they felt they were feasibly able to provide to students in the classroom.

Toward the end of the 2005-2006 academic year, successive board meetings showed that a dialectic began between the regional center’s high school and the district board. The regional center’s high school opposed to the district’s standardized version of the phase system. This was voiced in a report to the board in which the author of the high school’s report is “talking back” to the district’s phase system. The following is an excerpt from that 2006 report:

Although there are different opinions as to what forces drive the current curriculum evaluation and revision process in the district, I have been an educator long enough to know that the signs indicate that it is time to take a close look at what is happening at Regional Center High School. While I will leave teacher comments to another section of this paper, I would like to suggest that the indicators that I have looked at have led me to believe that a comprehensive review of the current Phase Model and program are in order. With little support from the very people who are closest to the action (i.e., teachers), I believe it would be irresponsible to continue business as usual. As a matter of fact, I believe it is time to adhere to the RCHS Mission Statement which says: [“]The faculty and staff of RCHS will work with the community to develop the academic, personal, and social potential of all students and to prepare them to be productive citizens of an ever-changing society and world.[”]
This points to teacher frustrations with the phase system. This initial report from the regional center high school subsequently led to discussion and a form of negotiation between the high school and the district board of education. This example also illustrates a process that will be explained more fully in the next section.

As previously mentioned, the superintendent was a constant voice in support of the implementation initiatives in the district and attempts to mitigate apparent resistance among those who oppose the phase system and shifts in district policy and curriculum in general. Such statements were found in his superintendent report to the board. In his report in June 2006 he states:

The educational program that the district offers our students will always need to be repaired and upgraded. No educational program can remain stagnant and still keep our children current with the rapidly changing society that they live in today. Providing our students with an education today has required a major paradigm shift from the way they were educated 25 to 50 years ago. To meet the expectations required by the federal government (NCLB) and the state's standards will require all of us working together. We (that's you, me and everyone else) will need to add to, subtract from, adapt, modify, and continuously critique the curriculum and the way it's taught so that all of our students can receive the best possible education that will meet their needs now and in their future.

This statement, like others given by the superintendent, not only tried to calm apprehension over changes in the district, but also exemplifies a tendency to create a sense of cohesion among district parents, educators and administrators by identifying a shared mission.

Regarding the phase system, the district board members do not publicly embrace it; rather, they regularly raise concerns about the new system. From December 2004 through the
2005-2006 academic year, board members consistently voiced concerns about the phase system, which are documented in the meeting minutes. Another interesting source of frustration on the phase system came from the survey responses from students who have dropped out of high school. The survey was reported in the January 2007 truancy report and included twelve student comments stating that the reason(s) for dropping out of high school involved confusion and frustration with the phase system.

In 2006 the debate surrounding the phase system came to a head when board members were involved in a community public hearing devoted solely to the phase system. However, even after this meeting some discussion and questioning about the system continued through both the board members and indirectly from the public. This example not only indicates the board’s role in the district discourse around this initiative, but informs understanding on the extent to which this was a widespread and heated issue in the district at this time.

It was from the debate surrounding the phase system that a mutual adaptation began to occur in the district in regards to this issue. The implementation of policy in the district at least to some extent took shape due to the talk and debate surrounding it or parts of it. The phase system in particular was the most prominent curriculum issue in the district during the majority of the time of this research. However, the same attention to one curriculum issue, could mean the exclusion of another, thus hindering the other policy from being implemented. The extent to which the phase system issue was debated, took attention away from the goal of restructuring the bilingual program. Although this language planning effort was mentioned earlier in the NCLB District improvement plan, it was not pursued until much later. In this way the resistance to one district policy initiative hindered the implementation of another policy.
Infrastructural Issues

Other significant reoccurring issues that were a challenge to the district, and often issues in the implementation of policy, related to the schools physical infrastructure, included providing facilities and providing for their maintenance and upkeep, the availability and creation of sewage and water plant facilities and electricity, and teacher housing. Although to a smaller extent, social infrastructure was also supported by the district.

Physical Infrastructure

The construction projects that occurred in the district between 2004 and 2009 were multiple and on going. Virtually every board meeting packet analyzed for this research contained a project’s status report that detailed the progress on each construction or maintenance project in the district, as well as the status on the funding for the project. In addition, an infrastructural framework as it commonly exists elsewhere in the United States, is not present in the same way in this rural region in Alaska. The Rural Tundra School District is located in a harsh terrain that presents the school district with a few climate related challenges. Examples to be discussed in this section are supplying electricity to school facilities, water treatment and sewage facilities operations, facility construction and maintenance, and providing teacher housing. Some of these concerns were specifically addressed in the superintendent’s report from April 2007 by mentioning that “In the next 3 to 5 years, the District will be confronted with several major challenges. A few of these challenges are: the relocation of the schools …, sustainability of new water and sewer systems in villages, and the increase in the over all costs to the District.” Needless to say, these concerns to the district are significant, and will require the district to continue efforts to manage this aspect of the district. All these infrastructural issues at the very least influence funding needs throughout the district and thus indirectly affect the funds available
for other programs. Also, the separation of operating funds from Capital funds creates yet another challenge for implementation. Furthermore Capital funds point to the relationship the district has with higher-level government since capital funds for building maintenance and facility construction comes the federal government. Also since the Rural Tundra School District operates as a Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) with no tax base, their dependency on the government for this funding is high. Some infrastructural issues played a more direct role in the ability of the district to adhere to mandates, and others in the effectiveness of policy implementation.

_School facility needs._

Issues with limited facilities in the district are not limited to the district’s village communities. In a letter to the district board dated February 19th, 2006, the regional center’s language immersion elementary school’s academic policy committee expressed frustration about renting school space from the city’s other elementary school:

To explain, there are two large classrooms in use or reserved for computer lab and another for the library for regular elementary school students, but immersion elementary school students are not allowed to use any of these three classrooms. The lack of space we suffer is evident when we give our kids certain tests: We have no quiet room for this. Instead, our students have to take tests in the hallway, which we all know isn't appropriate or adequate for giving or taking tests.

This statement not only points to the logistical frustrations, but also to how these logistical frustrations were felt to be possibly affecting student performance. The principal of the immersion school repeats these claims in 2007 letter to the board, which was a request for their own separate school building. The letter stated the need for the entire school to be located under
the same roof. The school was divided, with Kindergarten and first grade in its own building and the second through the sixth grades in the wing of the city’s other elementary school, mentioned previously. Not only is it logistically hard to run a school that is divided in such a way, but the school’s principal explains in the letter that they are also pressed for space, and the “lack room for testing, time-out, counseling, and small group instruction.” The principal further explains that housing the entire charter school, which is a Yup’ik immersion school, in one building would encourage the language nest model. This and other requests made by the school for its own building voice a concern for the effect the facilities will have on student learning and performance.

Teacher housing.

Included in facilities that the district is responsible to provide are teacher housing units for village school sites. In the 2005-2006 budget assumptions from the March 2005 meeting packet, the board appropriates $600,000 for teacher housing, which includes new housing, renovations, in-kind portions of grants, leases, purchases of standardized furniture and appliances. This illustrates the position the school district is in, assuming the responsibilities of a landlord to incoming teachers. With this comes the need to financially support, teacher housing efforts. Additionally the same budget assumption report mentioned that:

The board will establish a housing review committee (Board representative, administration, and LKNEA representative) to determine needs at each site. The housing review team will assess each unit, as per the teacher's negotiated agreement, prior to the March Board meeting of each year to determine the housing need district wide. 7% of the total revenue generated by teacher housing will replenish this account and the remainder of the revenue will be allocated back to sites as it is generated. Regular funds may be used to supplement
housing costs with LKSD Board approval.

In all the following four district budget assumptions, nearly identical plans were laid out, with the money allotted to teacher housing projects steadily declining slightly to $491,000.

The attention given to teacher housing by the district indicates not only the amount of resources devoted to housing for incoming teachers, but also recognition by the district of the connection between teacher housing and recruiting teachers to the district. This will be discussed in the section regarding teacher retention and turnover.

*Electricity, water, and sewage plants.*

Commonly throughout the United States, a school district and its schools are able to tap into an already existing modern infrastructure to provide essentials such as electricity, water and plumbing. In the case of the villages of the Rural Tundra School District, however, there is often no such infrastructure in place. Rather, the district itself must provide the infrastructure. For example, in all villages, the district provides water plant facilities and staff to allow for indoor plumbing and clean water in the school buildings and teacher housing units. For this reason, the district is constantly working to allocate funding and grants for the upkeep of such facilities.

The first and most obvious challenge is brought on by the extremely cold, long, and dark winter months, which require large amounts of fuel and electricity to heat and light buildings. The availability of resources needed for school facilities is often a real challenge in this region. In October 2008, the superintendent reports that, “The early freeze up has prevented a couple of village utility providers from receiving oil shipments. We have been contacted by local corporations … about purchasing fuel. We have agreed to sell some fuel in both villages, but we do not have enough to meet their needs, and still be able to operate the schools through the end of the year.” Another school reports in April 2009 challenges they face in securing convenient
and reliable electricity to the school:

The power source for day-to-day operation of the main building had been our own two old generators. The move to city power this year—due to their offer of a good rate and construction of their new power plant—has added convenience and reliability to the school. However, the rate was raised three months into the agreement due to high fuel prices last summer. As a result, our electric bill far exceeded the budgeted amount for power. Savings on fuel made up some, but not all, of the additional cost for electricity.

These individual school concerns become district concerns. Schools without electricity and fuel simply cannot operate. These issues are addressed seriously and frequently in board meetings.

In addition to these infrastructure concerns, some of the districts biggest infrastructural projects involve creating and sustaining water and sewage facilities in villages to accommodate school facilities. One of the first things mentioned in one school’s report to the board dealt with the water plant provided by the district:

The only new construction at our site in many years has been the addition of our water plant building. We are proud of our new water well and treatment facility. We have good tasting, healthy water, and our white clothes come out of the washing machine "white" instead of "yellow". We no longer need to filter our water for arsenic. In addition, teacher housing receives weekly water delivery from our well. This savings to our housing budget equals approximately $3200 a month. However, we still receive sewer service from the city and are researching the cost of buying our own sewer tank and vacuum unit. We are currently running our own
generators to furnish electricity to our school building. The city’s utilities has had
generator and fuel problems so it is undetermined when we will be using the city
power again.

This shows the extent to which the physical infrastructural efforts are recognized by village
communities, and also where there are concerns of availability and reliability of sources of
electric power, and sewage services. This trend of the district to provide the sewage and water
treatment facilities for their schools may be shifting as comments made by the superintendent in
his April 2007 report indicate that there are state and federal efforts to provide, create or initiate
this type of service in many Native rural villages:

The State and Federal Government are pushing to put water and sewer systems
(running water and flush toilets) in many of the villages: [names of villages
omitted]. Anticipating that the schools will provide the major funding to sustain the
water and sewer systems. Currently, most of the District schools are self-sufficient,
so switching to a community based water and sewer system would add additional
costs to the operation of the school. The only way the schools could afford to make
the switch is if the community system could provide water and sewer more
economically than current costs to the schools. To do that the cost for residents
would increase considerably.

So, even when infrastructure such as this is being provided, there are financial considerations
that the district and board must take into consideration for each individual school’s case.

Additionally the previous example also shows how the actions of the federal government play an
influential role in the financial burden that the district must address. It illustrates how the district
is financially dependent on the
Social Infrastructure

Not to be overlooked in the infrastructural needs of the district are those services and networks that are social in nature. The Rural Tundra School District plays an involved role as a partner. As stated in the district’s Social Work department’s June 2008 report, these efforts are carried out among the district social work department and other community offices and institutions—including, but not limited to the local health clinic, Department of Juvenile Justice, state troopers, police department, Village Public Safety Officers, and traditional councils—in order to provide social infrastructure in the region’s communities that is much needed. The district’s Social Work Department itself works on issues that affect children both in and out of school, from bullying to suicide prevention.

In general, the institution of public schooling is now so central to the communities of the district, especially in villages, that they provide a center of sorts for meetings and events to be held. Moreover many events that occur in villages are school related, whether it be sports events, other student organization meetings, local school board meetings, or family nights.

The newly implemented Family Nights is creating a space to encourage parental involvement in a community setting, which is a stated goal in the districts NCLB improvement plan. In the same improvement goal mentioned previously to increase proficiency in language arts and math throughout the district, the fourteenth strategy listed is organizing family nights at the school sites. These family nights were described in the improvement plan as being offered “at all sites through the Migrant Education Outreach Program. The skills offered are: storytelling, oral reading to children, crafts, singing together, and learning games. It will be delivered through family nights held once a month in communities.” By providing the space and other support for
such family nights, the district is facilitating community interaction that might not occur otherwise.

I can verify from a village school site visit during my internship time in the district that family nights are occurring. In one specific village, some teachers were spending the Friday afternoon preparing for the family game night that evening. This is one example of how that strategy of the district’s improvement plan is being implemented locally.

While the district does provide some necessary social infrastructure, they did not meet all the needs of communities. In the same survey previously cited, there was also another prominent reason cited by a few students: their responsibilities as teen parents. These students cited the responsibilities of parenthood as a significant reason for leaving school. The following student’s comment indicates a tie between the lack of social infrastructure in villages that might be helpful to teen mothers: “The first time I dropped was when I was pregnant with my baby and the second was I had no babysitter” If there were some form of community day care for children of teen mothers, perhaps they would be able to continue their high school education. While accommodating the needs of pregnant teens and teen parents may at some level seem distant from the policy implementation efforts that the district deals with, improving the dropout rate and ultimately the graduation rate is essential in meeting AYP, and therefore a concern to the district in relation to NCLB implementation.

The physical infrastructure in the district’s schools is significant in that it influences facilities that are the actual space where educational policy is implemented on a micro level. For this reason, the district’s facilities are a major concern. In order to meet the demands of imposed mandates the district recognizes the importance of satisfying teachers’ and students’ needs.
These needs are met to some extent in facilities and resources that promote student learning, and a positive atmosphere for teachers.

To date, the physical and social infrastructure that the district provides points to some dependency of the local village communities on the school district through its facilities and programs. Although the role of schools in Native education has shifted dramatically in the past century to a space with increased self-determination for Native Americans, the dependency on the school system continues to be perpetuated. In the Rural Tundra School District this is in part exhibited through the infrastructural issues in the district.

Teacher Retention, Turnover, and Native Teacher certification

Even before NCLB, the district experienced challenges in recruiting, retaining, and certifying teachers. This, like infrastructure and policy implementation, was a constant theme in district board meetings. The turnover rate in the district is high, fluctuating between ten and eighteen percent in the years observed for this study. The vast majority of teachers leaving the district were non-Native teachers, and recruiting to fill these positions occurred mostly outside of the region, either elsewhere in Alaska or within the greater United States. The issues concerning teachers working in the district differ slightly with respect to Native teachers versus non-Native teachers. Regarding Native teachers, certification efforts are at the forefront of district discourse. In fact, the district’s affirmative action plan states that their goal is to have the district’s teaching staff represent the ethnic backgrounds of students. However, the district has yet to reach this goal. In addition to collaborating with universities in creating teacher certification programs, the district is also involved in programs that encourage current students to consider future teaching careers in the district.

Affirmative Action
In its reports to the board, the Department of Personnel and Student Services consistently refers to its affirmative action goal. In their October 2009 report, the department gives the most elaboration on this goal:

The District's Affirmative Action Plan has been in place since the 1980's, and requires that we report progress to the Board annually. We have met the goals for all areas with two exceptions. Currently there are 62 Alaska Native Teachers and Administrators, which represents 16.4% of our certified staff. Although a higher percentage than other school districts, this is well short of our goal of having a staff that is representative of the ethnic backgrounds of our students. We have slowly declined in this area from the years when the district's teaching staff approached 25% Alaska Native teachers. The District Office classified staff is 58% Alaska Native which is short of the 63% goal.

This not only informs on the district affirmative action goal, but also the number of Alaska Native staff members. Despite their stated goal of a staff that is reflective of students’ ethnic backgrounds, there is still a significant disparity between the majority of staff in the district and the students regarding their ethnic backgrounds. From their other reports these numbers fluctuated only slightly during the span of time observed for this research.

In the summer courses offered, the district combines both efforts to certify teachers in collaboration with universities, as well as to work toward the affirmative action goal. From my own experience assisting in this course while interning at the district, I found that efforts were made to cater to the teachers attending. Not only was it held during a time of year that was the most convenient for teachers to come from their villages and stay in the regional center for two weeks, but the content of the course was intended to make them part of the process of district curriculum planning. Part of the assignments and class work done during the summer 2009
session were to align the Yup’ik curriculum with the state and district standards and assessments. So instead of sitting in a classroom being told how to teach and what to teach, Alaska Native educators in the district are being involved in the process that they must eventually implement in their classrooms. Needless to say, this method of certifying Alaska Native classified teachers is time-consuming, but it takes into consideration their way of life and experience as educators, as well as aim to give them a sense of ownership of district curriculum and its implementation.

There is also indication that the district is taking long-term measures that they hope will establish a more local teacher base that reflects the majority Yup’ik population. This is most apparent in the Future Teachers of Alaska student organization. The Future Teachers of Alaska is an organization for high school students throughout the district, which is explicitly stated as an effort to encourage local students to consider a teaching profession, which might ultimately be within the district. In response to the district concern of the high teacher turnover rate, this purpose of the Future Teachers of Alaska is directly stated in the October 2004 report from the Department of Personnel and Student Services:

We can help alleviate this problem, by continuing to focus on programs to grow our own teachers. The Future Teachers of Alaska Clubs that we have started will hopefully result in more graduates who will become teachers. Last spring we had 31 students in FTA clubs at 4 sites, and so far this year we have 6 sites and at least 60 students. Although it will be several years before any of these students become teachers, it should provide us some great homegrown educators in the future.

An update was given in the October 2008 report from the same, stating that the Future Teachers of Alaska program grew to 13 sites and 123 students. This is noteworthy because it shows conscious effort by the district to expand this program. Not only that, but it is the department that
is in charge and reporting this expansion is the Department of Personnel and Student Services, rather than in the Student Activities Coordinator. Being overseen by the department that is responsible for the staff of the district and overall service to students, points to the district’s intention of promoting the program. In its October 2004 report the department explicitly states, “We have always maintained that the most desirable solutions to recruiting teachers are to grow our own, and to improve retention of teachers. We seem to be able to hire good teachers with lots of potential, but many of them leave about the time they learn enough to become really effective.” This shows that the aim at “growing their own” teachers is a method in dealing with the lack of highly qualified teachers and the high teacher turnover rate.

*Teacher Recruitment and Reducing Teacher Turnover*

While the district was making efforts to influence the teacher retention rate and address their affirmative action goals in the long term, it was also making simultaneous efforts to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, who were predominantly outsiders to the region. To a great extent, this recruitment involves advertising at job fairs for newly credentialed teachers both in Alaska and in the lower 48. To be a competitive employer recruitment efforts involve improving the infrastructure, specific to the availability of quality teacher housing. The superintendent has mentioned in reports the need for the district to offer competitive wages and quality housing in order to attract teachers to the district and lessen the teacher turnover rate. The housing concern in particular, discussed previously, points to the district’s recognition that infrastructure issues affect the implementation of certain mandates. This is found in the superintendent’s report from his January 2007 report, where he superintendent states:

> Once our teachers are trained in the use of our curriculum and the record keeping process, the challenge is to retain them. For the past couple of years, we have seen a major
improvement in the retention of our teachers. In 2000, 2001 and 2002, our staff turn over was around 20-24%. It has slowly decreased and this year it's 14-15%. The decline in teacher turnover is the results of several factors. Two of the most important ones; are the District's emphasis on staff development/mentor program, and the increase in the quality of teacher housing in the villages. Both of these efforts need to continue.

As in other instances, the district is the institute responsible for creating the necessary infrastructure to accommodate schools' needs. This trend is reported again in the October 2008 report from the personnel department:

The turnover rate at the end of the 2007-08 year was the lowest in many years (9.7%) as demonstrated on the chart below. Hopefully, the increased emphasis on providing adequate teacher housing, competitive salaries, and great work environments is making a difference in our teacher retention rates, It should also be noted that since this is the final year of HB 161 (retire/rehire), it is anticipated that the turnover rate will be substantially higher in 2008-09.

The district focus on teacher retention and recruitment was significant in that it involved district resources, which, in this case, are supporting projects to bring teachers into the district.

Beyond the general recognition that the district must ensure that housing exists, they must also ensure that it meets certain standards. The district’s Department of Plant Facilities state in an August 2009 report to the board that:

Housing related work remains a priority for Plant Facilities as we recognize the costs related to retaining vs. recruiting teachers for our schools. All new housing units should have water and sewer service that does not have to be delivered and or emptied.
This further consideration brings to light the extent to which the district’s resources and energy must be devoted to teacher housing. The report goes on to explain how it is most cost-effective to accomplish this goal in regards to the contractor’s work. It then states that there are significant financial obstacles, specifically that, “Unfortunately, at this time Plant Facilities does not have the resources to accommodate the housing requests and, concurrently maintain our educational facilities.” This presents a multiple challenges that the district is trying to deal with in its efforts to be a competitive teacher employer while at the same time not compromising the education they provide.

Even in the Regional Center, teacher housing was an issue. Although housing options existed, it was noted in the October 2004 personnel and student services department report that it is extremely costly and that that was a factor in the high turnover rate in the regional center’s high school and middle school. They even state that this city “has become one of the most difficult communities to recruit teachers for because of the cost of housing. … According to our surveys the cost of housing has been a significant contributor to their leaving.” This illustrates a connection between the infrastructure, in this case availability of housing options available to teachers, and maintaining a quality teacher base. Furthermore, this points to a tension that exists

Interpretation of Results According to Relevant Literature

Considering the specific implementation process that occurred at Rural Tundra, the role of the school board and local communities, the restructuring of the bilingual programs, and the efforts to encourage more local Alaska Native teachers, certain themes of self-determination and community consensus emerge that resonate with the literature reviewed for this research.
Implementation Process at Rural Tundra

Over the course of the years observed, some general trends in the implementation of education policy could be detected, which correspond to Odden’s three stages of educational policy implementation. According to Odden (1991), these stages begin with initial resistance, followed by mutual adaptation between policy makers and policy implementers. Finally the programs are fully implemented but attention is given to those issues that are preventing the policy from achieving its stated goals. Among different actors in the Rural Tundra School District, there were differing views of the implementation progress of the No Child Left Behind mandates as well as the Alaska Standard-based initiative.

Mutual Adaptation

As previously mentioned, mutual adaptation is the second step in the process of implementation that occurs after the first stage, initial resistance to policy. In this stage, there is negotiation between those with “internal professional expertise and an external political support structure” (Odden, 1991, p. 5). The example of the regional center’s high school seeking and gaining permission for alterations in the phase system in their school shows mutual adaptation, and indicates movement from the first to second phase of policy implementation. In April of 2006, District Board members passed approval for the modifications proposed to the high school’s curriculum, with the stipulation that the modifications be approved by the district curriculum department and, by request of one board member, that a report be presented to the board the following year indicating the progress of the program. This example conveys how mutual adaptation occurred between the district and the regional center high school, which was facilitated by the district board.
Third Stage of Implementation

According to Odden (1991), the third stage of policy implementation is characterized by the full implementation of a policy, but there is still a focus on how to make the implemented program effective in achieving its purpose. In other words, there are kinks in the new system that must be smoothed out in order for the policy to really “work” and achieve it intended goal.

In presenting the years activities to the board in April 2008, the Department of Instructional Programs (Dept. Academic Programs and Support) state that in that year, “The primary focus was on systematizing current services offered by the department including the professional development model with implementation support in all curricular areas, curriculum review cycle, course adoption process, dual credit courses and bilingual program review.” All of these things indicate a shift from the second to the third stage of Odden’s implementation mold.

From 2008 through 2009 there seems to be more emphasis on making the implemented curricular changes effective. There are three clear examples of this indicated from the data analyzed. These include the adoption of an adapted Mathematics curriculum, a grant funded Arts in Literacy program piloted in some schools, as well as a renewed focus on the bilingual program as a means of addressing student achievement.

The board approved the Everyday Mathematics pilot program at the end of the 2007-2008 academic year. The program would be tried out at five Rural Tundra School District sites, in nineteen elementary classrooms with a total of 402 students participating. The program proponents claim that the program: de-emphasizes of rote learning of basic facts, uses of alternative algorithms, allows use of calculators for some activities, and offers adequate training for staff. In the report advocating the adoption of the pilot program, the author brings attention to the fact that these aims of the program are addressing public concerns about the math curriculum
a year prior.

In 2007 The Department of Academic Programs presented information on its Arts in Literacy program. Like Everyday Mathematics, this program was a step back from the pressured teaching of core subject areas associated with NCLB, by “integrating performing, visual and Native arts into the literacy curriculum.” The Arts in Literacy is another example of programmatic responses occurring in stage three of larger policy implementation, in that it considered students’ sociocultural environment in programs aimed at enhancing a core subject, literacy.

Also, as previously mentioned there was a renewed district initiative, in 2007, focusing on reviewing and revising the bilingual program in place throughout the district. This also exemplifies Odden’s third stage of policy implementation. Even though language issues were recognized early on as fundamental in affective implementation of NCLB. It wasn’t until 2007 that efforts were really taken to begin addressing this issue in the district.

In addition to “tweaking” programs to make them accomplish their goals, there are also indications that administrators in the district in the more recent years of NCLB implementation are reevaluating the significance/implications of the meeting the mandates. Regarding the significance of AYP, the superintendent writes in his August 2008 report:

It is important to keep the meaning of the AYP designation in perspective. The NCLB system of defining AYP relies on a narrow definition of what successful students and schools are. Also, very minor changes in the performance of one or two students can have a significant statistical effect on the AYP designation of a small school. It is important to look deeper into student performance data, and at other indicators of school success. By those measures, we have a lot to be proud of. It is equally important to not lose site [sight]
of what we, as a District, believe makes a student and a school successful. By focusing on a more holistic view of what makes up a good education, students will be more motivated, and their knowledge and skills will be better able to help them succeed in life.

These words from the superintendent to the board seem to be expressing/advocating a reevaluation of what AYP actually means in their district context. He seems to be expressing that making AYP is not the whole picture of the education that the district aims to provide.

Language Program Planning Through Policy Implementation

From the report that outlined the district’s improvement plan, both explicit and implicit intentions were mentioned that would affect the language program. Unintentionally or implicitly, there was also consideration given to the community-school relationship that is beneficial to any school-based language maintenance program. Although the Language Program development was initially mentioned in the district’s NCLB improvement plan, it still focuses on mastery of English as a means to meet the goals of the NCLB policy. The later renewed focus on the language program seems to be in recognition of the potential overall improvements in student performance with more locally tailored bilingual programs.

Building a strong connection between the home and school by involving parents and involving the entire family in the education of their children is an essential part of a successful school-based language maintenance program (Alston & Trujillo, 2005). The initiation of family nights throughout the district is one way that Rural Tundra is parents and the community into school activities. It was further mentioned in the board packets that such family nights may include village elders, story telling, singing and dancing. In this way, the family nights might be seen as an extension of the Yup’ik language and culture curriculum, where the entire community
can be involved. This sort of involvement, according to Alston & Trujillo, can build community trust in the schools and create a cooperative relationship between schools and communities.

The language program restructuring, as it is unfolding at Rural Tundra is another significant part of creating an effective school-based language program. From my experience in the district, the language program planning efforts were ongoing and has in part involved extensive meetings in village school communities where interested elders, parents, and other community members are discussing and learning about various other language program models, and working to come to a community consensus on which model is the most suitable for their village school. This is proving to be a labor-intensive collaborative effort. However what the district is allowing to happen is shifts in curriculum—specifically that curriculum which is part of the Yup’ik culture and way of knowing—that is to some extent being decided by the Native communities themselves. In this way the language program planning process is allowing for a new dimension of self-determination in the district’s education.

Even though the language planning initiative is to some extent a response to the federal educational mandate and an effort for the effective implementation of it, it is creating a space for increase local Native community involvement in the school-based language program. Baker (2006) comments that at the heart of bilingual education are politics and power relations (p. 414). For this reason, the expansion of Yup’ik self-determination in bilingual program of the Rural Tundra School District, is one that is determined by the power relationships among the local communities, the school district administration, and state and federal governments.

This type of local involvement is crucial in a school-based language and culture program. Lipka & McCarty (1994) point out that Indigenous communities are rarely monolithic social or political entities. There are inherent conflicting views within Native communities regarding such
school-based programs. These may include the degree of support or suspicion of having Native
language included in the school curriculum (Manuelito, 2003, p. 3). Baker (1992) points to social
considerations affecting language shift, specifically the number of speakers of a minority
language in a given community. While Yup’ik is a language that is still acquired naturally from
family members to children (Bernhardt, 2001), this is not necessarily the case in all villages and
in all families. While some villages use virtually all Yup’ik and make a point of passing to down
to children, other villages are experiencing more language shift toward English, and children
may not be learning Yup’ik at home. This is one example of a linguistic consideration as it
applies to the Rural Tundra region that influences attitudes toward the minority and dominant
language. Baker (1992) further states that there are institutional effects that influence language
attitude, including schooling and language usage in the daily life of a community. While he
states that teaching a language can lead to attitude change, he also states that when a language
has no place in daily business, administration, and transactions, is likely to be linked to attitude
‘decline’” (p.110). Since the extent of language usage and language shift is not identical in each
village, it is beneficial to adapt the bilingual program to each community. For this reason, having
the local communities reach a consensus about the state of language usage in their community
and the form of language program that they want is fundamental in founding community support
of the school-based language program that is to be implemented.

The Rural Tundra School District is allowing for this local community involvement by
providing the communities with information regarding language program models. The models
that the villages may choose vary, and include the option to transition into instruction entirely in
English by the sixth grade to incorporating equal amounts both Yup’ik and English language
throughout the school curriculum. There are also various options for immersion. Although
language program models that are most effective include integration of language instruction into other subjects (Manuelito, 2003) and immersion (Alston and Trujillo, 2005), it is the individual communities that must come to a consensus about what they think their community needs in the school’s language program. The differences in language attitudes and usage from village to village reflect the programs that villages are opting for.

Essentially, for the school-based bilingual program in the Rural Tundra district to function as a language maintenance program, the communities must reach a consensus that the purpose of the bilingual program is no longer solely to help children become accustomed to the language of instruction and function in school, but that the bilingual program should transform into deliberately being a space for language maintenance. This is the fundamental issue that must be decided individually by each community. Although each community may not reach complete unanimity in the decision regarding the function and model of the bilingual program, it is crucial that the community lead in making this decision.

The language program planning is an ongoing process and has in part involved extensive meetings in village school communities where interested elders, parents, and other community members are discussing and learning about various other language program models, and working to come to a community consensus on which model is the most suitable for their village school. This is proving to be a labor-intensive collaborative effort. However what the district is allowing to happen is shifts in curriculum—specifically that curriculum which is part of the Yup’ik culture and way of knowing—that is to some extent being decided by the Native communities themselves.

Not only does this point to Native-determined shifts in the language program which may address local as well as higher-level policy implementation needs, but it also points to multiple
tiers of implementation that occur in the district. In the final stage of implementation, when ineffective aspects of the overall program become apparent to district administrators, educators and parents, there are district initiatives that are intended to remedy them. This appears to be the case with the review of the bilingual program. Since it is an unavoidable part of the curriculum that underlies all other core subject areas, reestablishing a language program that is effective will potentially influence student performance across the board.

Native Self-determination in District Roles and Relationships

As one of the twenty-one Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAA), the Rural Tundra School District has had locally elected school boards and a locally elected school board since the 1920s. This provided more local control in the region’s educational system. However there are still complex limitations in the extent of Native self-determination in the Rural Tundra School District.

Bernhardt (2003) mentions that in the establishment of the REAAs, each was provided with room to design schooling policies and practices that are appropriate for the particular cultural and linguistic population of that region. She also states that the actions and responsibilities of boards of REAAs participate in forming policies regarding budgets, hiring, curriculum and development, and assessment (p. 21). To some extent, this is the case in the Rural Tundra School District. The School Board does form policies regarding the district’s budget, and it does control the hiring of the superintendent. However, the district board at Rural Tundra does not have direct involvement with curriculum planning. Curriculum planning is an area where the district board is consistently asserting itself by stating their questions and concerns about district curriculum and programs. The most direct involvement in curriculum and program planning was reserved for the district departments. While the departments did report their work and their
progress to the board, ultimately the board had little direct involvement with deciding the details of district initiatives. If local Alaska Native self-determination is to be realized in the region’s educational system, there should be an increase in the direct involvement of the school and district boards.

**Encouraging a Local Teacher Base**

Regardless of the direction that the Yup’ik-English bilingual program takes at each school site, having Native educators in the classrooms is extremely valuable in influencing student success (Alston & Trujillo, 2005). The district’s efforts to encourage students to consider a teaching profession in the district, as seen in the Future Teachers of Alaska student organization and comments about “growing their own” teachers in the future, are taking this into consideration.

Increasing the Native teaching base in the Rural Tundra School District will also allow for a more supportive base to allow Native teachers to critically assess the educational system. Quicho and Rios (2000) argue that an underlying problem in the educational system is a lack of critical questioning from Native educators of the system. They further point out that when most of the administrative positions are held by non-Natives, there is less room and motivation to question the status quo. This is true of the highest administrative positions in Rural Tundra. Interestingly, although the majority of administrators as well as educators are non-Yupik, the superintendent made comments emphasizing a sense of cohesion among those in the district. This emphasis on cohesion may have the power to limit the possibilities for questioning of the status quo in the district. The first step in moving toward a point where Native educators in the Rural Tundra School District can critically assess their school system and assert expanded self-
determination and also occupy more of the higher-level administrative roles, is potentially to work toward solidifying a Native majority teaching staff.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Policy implementation produces dynamics that affect the school governance, curriculum, programs, and many district initiatives. Although the stated aims of policy may be different, recent educational policies work as a tool to standardize. In this effort to standardize, Native language is a particularly vulnerable area of the curriculum. Especially in the case of predominantly Native school districts, the effects of state and federal educational policy tie in with Native self-determination and school-based heritage language and culture curriculum content. Observations made on the Rural Tundra School District illustrate this dialectic and point to areas where recent change should be sustained and other areas where attention should be directed, regarding self-determination and the bilingual program at Rural Tundra.

The school board in the Rural Tundra School district was engaged in approving the district decisions regarding approaches to implementing policy and dealing with all other aspects of district services. Although they were involved in the district dialogue, the board was not formulating curricular plans or courses of action. Virtually all programs in the district were planned by individual departments headed by the superintendent. This perhaps points to limitations in educational self-determination by the school board. However, they did hold the power to approve or deny all district spending decisions. Recent district department initiatives did seem to be encouraging self-determination on the village community level in the restructuring of the bilingual program. Such programmatic adjustments were made in the final stage of policy implementation, were initiated with the purpose of making mandated policy effective, and had the impact of encouraging a community form of Native self-determination in education outside the role of the school board.
I recommend the district build its curriculum around a continued conscientious effort to involve village communities in the curriculum planning process. This is something that the district has already exhibited initiating in its bilingual program restructuring. Also, this recommendation is not necessarily a novel one. Other research has found that local control of school-based language and culture programs is the most effective (Alston & Trujillo, 2005). This is beneficial in considering all parts of the curriculum, not only the language and culture aspects. Also, depending on the language model, Native language instruction might be spread throughout all areas of the curriculum, and in this way should not be an isolated instance of including the Native community.

Increasing the number of Yup’ik Alaska Native teachers in the schools is also a way to increase local control and involvement in the curriculum and planning in the district and its schools. The district has already showed that it recognizes that encouraging locals to enter the teaching profession in the district would be beneficial. Specifically if the Future Teachers of Alaska Program is successful in fulfilling the goals that the district has set for it, it would aid in working toward their stated affirmative action goal of a certified teacher base that not only reflects the population of the student body and also may improve the teacher retention rate. Additionally, increasing the number of Yup’ik teachers, who are fluent in Yup’ik language and teaching in various subject area, will make an integrated bilingual program more feasible.

It is easy to make the previous recommendations. However, it is much more challenging than it may seem to actually achieve. The approach should entail providing a forum where information can be shared so that village members can be equipped with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about the curriculum. In this way community members will not be limited to only the local school boards, and district departments can be a driving force
in the curriculum planning for their specific area. This has been the district’s recent approach in the language program restructuring efforts. Although it is time consuming, this approach may offer the most long-term benefits for both Native students in the village school as well as the village’s community in general. Likewise, it will also take time for students in the district intent on pursuing a future career in education, to begin to come back to the district and teach.

Another consideration to keep in mind regarding this recommendation is the financial challenges the district often seems to face. The district’s relationship with higher-level government is largely defined by their financial dependence on the state and federal governments. The government’s orientation toward public education cannot be entirely anticipated, but does go through periodic shifts, as a pendulum swings. How the district navigates these dynamics in the future will determine its ability to employ local visions and wishes in the education it provides.

Federal as well as state policy has had a strong influence over the Rural Tundra School District and local initiatives set in motion during the years from 2004 through 2009. Equally strong are local forces, which shape and influence the fidelity, effectiveness, and motivation that the district is able to put forth in implementation. Viewed through the framework of Odden’s (1991) three stages of policy implementation, the shifts in fidelity, effectiveness, and motivation of implementation are partially explained. Taking into consideration also the Native communities’—specifically Alaska Natives—collective memory and experience with American schooling gives a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of policy implementation as it played out in the Rural Tundra School District.

Schools for Native Americans have been a site that demanded assimilation into the American mainstream mold. They are a place where mainstream culture is emphasized and
perpetuated. This mainstream mold and culture, among other things, requires that English be the language of official affairs. This implies that for things to be considered meaningful, they must be conducted in English, which leaves limited social space for the use of Indigenous languages. In this research, the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) is repeating a demand that mastery of English should trump all other school-based language efforts. The dialectic between educational standardization efforts and advocacy for Native Language instruction is, to a large extent, played out in schools. Yet, schools are essential in the effort to maintain Native languages. Children spend the majority of their wakeful hours in schools. Even though it has a large base of speakers compared to almost all of the other Native languages in Alaska, Central Yup’ik is undergoing a language shift that cannot be ignored in considerations to education in predominantly Yup’ik regions.

Even with a strong bilingual program that used and promoted the Native language in all subject areas from Kindergarten through twelfth grade, there is still the understood reality that outside that region and even within it, the public space where the Yup’ik language can be used is limited. The District School Board Meetings are a clear example of the barrier to Yup’ik language usage. Although it is unclear to what extent Yup’ik might have been used in those meetings, English was used as the language of documentation. Although there is recognition that this area and its villages are traditional Yup’ik areas and that Yup’ik language and culture are to be valued and preserved, there is an unquestioned assumption that English be the dominant language. This is the real challenge that Native communities face in maintaining their languages: overcoming a commonly held implicit notion that minority Native languages have no place in mainstream communication. If schools are not reinforcing a Native community’s language and especially if that language is limited in its use outside of the community, there is an undeniable
threat to the language’s survival. Schools are one tool needed to combat the forces of language shift that minority Native communities face.

To insure that schools are a place where language maintenance can happen, local Native governance and self-determination has to be included. This governance might need to go beyond the traditional school board system. School boards, although they are involved in the districts’ affairs seem to be limited in the extent they are able to question authority and work independently to initiate changes. Although the Rural Tundra communities’ recent involvement in the language program restructuring is conditional upon the district’s providing that opportunity, it is an alternative approach toward increased local self-determination.

School governance in Indigenous education, with specific consideration toward policy implementation, bilingual education, and local self-determination, is an area in educational research that should be further investigated. Attention to considering the roles of school board members, superintendents, and the Native community can reveal a more nuanced understanding of Native education today. Such research, which takes into consideration the myriad of dynamics that influence policy and its implementation, would also shed light on the extent of Native self-determination in education. Attention should not be given to only national concerns of Native Education, but toward international as well. The postcolonial relationship that pushes linguistic assimilation into the dominant culture is not limited to Alaska Natives or even Native Americans in general. Varying degrees of linguistic assimilation is a common root cause of Indigenous language endangerment throughout the world. In the same way, postcolonial dialectics such as that in the Rural Tundra School District are also occurring in schooling in other nations and should be examined. An informed dialectic on the dynamics and functions of Native governance
in public schools and school-based programs has the potential to empower Native Communities as well as strengthen and validate their school-based language program initiatives.
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