



*Family surrounds the commissioned portrait of Fannie Kuutuuq Akpik-Piquuk. From left, Ethel Kuutuuq Burke, Stacy Qallutaqaraq Burke, Chelsi Alaġiaq Overby, and Robyn Niayuq Burke. The portrait now hangs in the Iļisaġvik College Lobby*

## **Iļisaġvik College Celebrates Educator Fannie Kuutuuq Akpik-Piquuk July 5, 2022**

Iļisaġvik College Board of Trustees honored the life and educational legacy of Fannie Kuutuuq Akpik-Piquuk at their summer Board of Trustees meeting on Wednesday, June 29th.

Akpik-Piquuk was a beloved educator and cherished member of the North Slope community who was taken by cancer on May 14, 2021. Over the years, she taught at Meade River School, Ipalook Elementary School, Barrow High School, and was an Associate Professor of Iñupiaq Studies at Iļisaġvik College for 20 years.

The event included the unveiling of a portrait of Akpik-Piquuk painted by Alaska artist Austin Parkhill, and remembrances by family members, colleagues, and students.

Iļisaġvik College board member Roxanne Brower presented a plaque to the attending family members honoring Akpik-Piquuk's forty-plus years of educational service. Then college president, Justina Avu Wilhelm, and Dean of Administration, Nicole Manuluuraq Evans, unveiled the painted portrait to audible gasps.

In the remembrances that followed, Etta Pakak Fournier recalled enlisting Akpik-Piquuk to help start the Iñupiaq Word of The Day program on KBRW Radio, and granddaughter Robyn Niayuq Burke recalled that she dedicated her whole life to education and the Iñupiaq language and culture. Burke, who is the Executive Director of Human Resources at Iļisaġvik, said, "When I came back to work at Iļisaġvik it was like coming home because we grew up in these halls."

Jana Pausauraq Harcharek, a long-time colleague, described working with Akpik-Piquuk to get two Iñupiaq Studies classes, "North Slope History, Language, and Culture," and "Iñupiat Land Use, Values, and Resources," accepted by the State of Alaska as part of the teacher certification program. "It improved the quality of education in all the schools across the North Slope," said Harcharek.

Jerica Niayuq Leavitt (Aamodt), a former student and current Iļisaġvik College Assistant Professor of Iñupiaq Studies, remembered Akpik-Piquuk's kindness, even when correcting students, and her ability to see her students' innate gifts, such as when she told one student, "You have the hands of a seamstress." Kimberlee Brent, another Iļisaġvik College professor who took classes with Akpik-Piquuk remembered her as, "The most enthusiastic [person], always open with a hug and a smile. Even when she was tired, she had more energy than anyone I ever knew."

Chief School Administrator for the North Slope Borough School District, David Vadivaloo, summed up Akpik-Piquuk's approach, saying, "She was not teaching or transmitting Iñupiat Culture, she radiated it. She embodied it."

The portrait painted by Parkhill will hang in the Iļisaġvik College lobby with a commemorative plaque. The lobby is open to visitors Monday-Friday 8:30-5.