



Members of Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit. From left: Justina Wilhelm, Iḷisaġvik College; Morrie Lemen, ICAS; George Edwardson, ICAS; David Vadiveloo, NSBSD; Scott Szymd, NSB; Debbie Edwardson, Iḷisaġvik College; Verson Edwardsen, NSB; Robyn Burke, NSBSD

NORTH SLOPE EDUCATION PARTNERS WORK AS ONE

September 28, 2022

Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit, *new tracks for our communities*, met at the end of September at Iḷisaġvik College to reaffirm their commitment to atauchimutka, *working together as one*.

Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit, a quadrilateral board composed of the leadership of the North Slope Borough (NSB), the North Slope Borough School District (NSBSD), Iḷisaġvik College, and the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS) began meeting in January of 2022. The goal of the collaboration is to maximize equity in educational, career, and technical training opportunities across the North Slope.

Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit is part of an ongoing process to manifest the vision put forth in Eben Hopson Sr.'s famous 1975 education speech outlining an Iñupiat school system reflecting Iñupiat educational philosophies and transmitting Iñupiat values and history: "I do not want my children to learn that we were "discovered" by Columbus or Vitus Bering.... I do not want to see school planning surveys which list hunting, fishing, whaling, or trapping as a "social" or "recreational" activity," Hopson said.

Working to break down the silos that have existed between organizations, Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit created four subgroups, all with representatives from each of the quad partners, to work on different aspects of education on the North Slope including: Student Outcomes, Broadband and Infrastructure, the Qatqiññaġvit Program for career exploration, and the Deadhorse Technical Training Center. North Slope Borough Mayor, Harry Brower, Jr., said, "Education is critical to ensuring the brightest future for our people. It will take all of us to make sure that our education system is custom built for the North Slope."

At the September meetings, these groups gave progress reports to the steering committee, formed a new subcommittee to address Iñupiat Education, and signed a Memorandum of Agreement emphasizing the need for increased cooperation and collaboration between the four regional organizations. Vernon Edwardsen, President of the NSB Assembly, recognized the hard work of these work group members: "The work groups doing the work and the administrators that are running the programs are making these initiatives successful."

The new subcommittee on Iñupiat Education will begin meeting to focus on ways to center Iñupiaq language and culture in education from early childhood through career training. David Vadiveloo, the Chief School Administrator at the NSBSD, affirmed his intention to reintroduce immersion language instruction into the school system in phases starting in 2024. "The reintroduction of immersion is part of our responsibility to the foundational work of Iñupiat educators and parents over the past 50 years," said Vadiveloo, and echoed Hopson in calling for Iñupiaq language and culture to be at the root of education, rather than an "added extra."

Everyone agreed that the meetings are working to break down the silos that have existed between organizations and to improve inter-agency communication. "You can feel it in the room," said Justina Wilhelm, Iļisaġvik College President, "People are connected and committed. They care and are ready to work together to continue the critical conversations."

Wilhelm said the signing of the MOA was the culmination of much hard work. Elder George Edwardson, ICAS President, was the first to sign. ICAS Executive Director, Morrie Lemen, Jr., said, "we recognize the gap in educational services, and we are working hard to meet the needs of our students and families."

The agreement includes a commitment to work together in good faith and to "utilize our resources to achieve equity in educational services and outcomes for all the students and residents of all North Slope communities."

Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit will meet again in January of 2023.