



STAKEHOLDERS MEET TO DISCUSS EDUCATION IN ALASKA'S NORTH SLOPE

February 23, 2022

North Slope entities came together for a two-day quadrilateral workshop to discuss ways to equitably improve education and training for the students and residents of the North Slope communities, ranging from K-12 to higher education. During the two-day meeting, it was clear that our aullatit (leaders) care deeply for our children and their educational needs. The hybrid virtual and in-person event took place at the Iñupiat Heritage Center. Both days extended into the evening, as it was evident the groups were committed to the vital discussion and to identifying strategies for student success, now and for future generations to come.

Entities consisted of the North Slope Borough (NSB) mayor, NSB assembly, North Slope Borough School District (NSBSD) superintendent, NSBSD Board of Education, Iñisaġvik College board of trustees, Iñisaġvik College president, the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS) council president, and ICAS executive director, as well as various administrative staff. Each day opened with heartfelt introductory remarks shared by the various leaders.

On the second day of the meeting, Iñisaġvik College president, Justina Wilhelm, introduced seven of the college's residential students who originate from several North Slope villages, Golovin, and Ft. Yukon. The students stood at the front of the multi-purpose room, where they introduced themselves and discussed their course of study, ending with one comment about what student success and support meant to them. Their comments received a standing ovation,

and some tears were seen in the audience. President Wilhelm shared, “This is why we are here today, for our students.”

Throughout the course of the workshop, North Slope Borough mayor, Harry Brower Jr., often said, “*atauchimutka*,” meaning we need to work as one. He talked about breaking down silos and barriers. NSB assembly president, Vernon Edwardsen, read aloud the late Eben Hopson Sr. mayor’s address on education that was originally delivered on December 19, 1975. The speech resonated amongst the group as to the importance of the Iñupiat community and the goal of true self-governance and local control. One section of the speech noted the following:

“It is important to remember the lessons of the past. In addition, we must search and master the new changes if we are to continue to dominate the Arctic. We have demonstrated we can survive the trespasses, which have been perpetuated upon us. We have been successful in establishing our own home rule government. We have been able to achieve self-government. We must strive to insure that our Borough, our city governments and our school systems reflect our Iñupiat ideals. We are Inupiaq.” (Eben Hopson, Sr.)

Over the course of the workshop, presentations were shared pertaining to student success and outcomes, and vocational and technical training needs, which consisted of a proposed technical training center in Prudhoe Bay and career and technical education opportunities for high school students. The meeting concluded with the creation of five working groups that will continue the dialogue and conversations amongst the four entities with equal representation of board members and administrative staff, along with a steering committee that will meet quarterly.

As the final point, the quadrilateral group was renamed the Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit, meaning new tracks for our communities. Closing remarks included each assembly person, board member, president, and Mayor Brower, who continued to message the importance of *atauchimutka*—to work as one. Mayor Brower closed the Nanaaqiurat Tumitchianjit in prayer.