

## **CHAPTER 6. EDUCATION**

At its broadest, education has many meanings—ranging from formal schooling to learning traditional family ways at home. For over a century, Alaska Native education in the United States was exclusively Western in content and culture, aiming to eliminate Native identity and replace it with a generic American—largely white European—identity and culture. Only in the last 30 years or so has U.S. policy towards Alaska Native and American Indian education renounced the goal of assimilation and, at least in theory, incorporated Native languages and cultures and included Native representation on school boards. Currently, the State of Alaska’s official policy on education is:

[T]o help ensure that all students will succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and be effective in improving the character and quality of the world around them.<sup>1</sup>

To reach this goal, effective education for Alaska Natives must give students the tools to operate in two cultures—the Native culture into which they are born, and the broader American culture in which they must also function. This is an enormous challenge. This chapter reviews successes, continuing challenges, and efforts to improve education for Alaska Native students.

### **Data Sources and Organization of Chapter**

We relied on a number of sources, as noted on the figures and in the text. Most of our data showing change over time are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Data on state and national proficiency test scores come from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and the National Center for Education Statistics. We also relied on the Alaska Department of Education for data on dropout rates. Whenever possible, we report findings by Alaska Native regional corporation areas.

The definition of Alaska Native in this chapter changes somewhat with different data sources. Whenever possible, we used the broad definition from the 2000 census—which includes all those who reported that they were American Indian or Alaska Native, whether or not they also specified some additional race. On the other hand, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), in collecting its data, does not include an option for specifying multiple races. So in analyses using DEED data, Alaska Native refers to those people who identified themselves as solely Alaska Native.

Below we first summarize our findings. Then we look at the successes in Native education over the past 40 years and in the most recent decade. Finally, we look at the major continuing challenges facing Alaska Native education.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1994 Alaska Education Laws, *Alaska Statutes Relating to Education, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 015.*

## Summary of Findings

- **Educational levels among Alaska Natives jumped sharply after high-school programs were established in almost all villages.** The share of rural Alaska Natives (over age 20) who had high-school diplomas jumped from 48 to 68 percent between 1980 and 1990 and continued growing between 1990 and 2000, up to 71 percent.
- **But recently, growing dropout rates have begun to tarnish the success of rural high schools.** Between 1998 and 2001, dropout rates among Native students increased from 5 percent to nearly 10 percent. Dropout rates among non-Native students also increased, but not as fast, growing from about 3 percent to 5 percent.
- **Recent dropout rates have been highest in the ANCSA regions with 80 percent or more Native enrollments.** Those figures include dropouts among all students, Native and non-Native. By contrast, in the early 1990s dropout rates in all regions were fairly similar.
- **Alaska Natives became much more likely to earn four-year college degrees in the past 20 years,** with the number of graduates more than tripling between 1980 and 2000.
- **A third of Native adults had at least some college credit by 2000,** up from 28 percent in 1990 and 15 percent in 1980.
- **But Native college students are still less likely than other students to graduate.** Among students at the University of Alaska, Native students in recent years had graduation rates only about half those of all students—5.4 percent compared with 10.7 percent.
- **Natives in some regions are much more likely to attend college.** Ten percent of Native adults in the Chugach region were in college in 2000, compared with 2 percent in some other regions.
- **Native women are significantly more likely to attend college than Native men.** Women made up nearly 60 percent of all Native students statewide in 2000, and in nine of the 12 ANCSA regions, Native women in college outnumbered men—sometimes by a margin of 2 to 1.
- **Native women are also more likely than Native men to have at least some college credit.** That's true in virtually all ANCSA regions, and the difference in several regions was more than 10 percentage points in 2000.
- **The wide gap in test scores between Native and non-Native students persists.** In recent years, roughly 40 to 60 percent of Native students have passed Alaska's standardized achievement tests. Among non-Native students, the percentage passing ranges from 70 to 80 percent or more.
- **As many as half of Native students don't pass the reading section** of the High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam, if you include those who drop out before ever taking the test.
- **The number of Alaska Native teachers remains small.** In 2001, about 5 percent of teachers statewide were Alaska Native, but the share ranged from virtually none in some districts to nearly a third in a few rural districts. And in 2003, less than 3 percent of the faculty at the University of Alaska were Native.
- **Younger, better educated Alaska Natives may be more likely to leave the state.** In 2000, more than half the Native adults living outside Alaska had at least some college credit, compared with about a third of Native adults in Alaska. Keep in mind, however, that relatively few Alaska Natives—regardless of their education or other characteristics—leave the state.

## **Progress Since 1960 and Since 1990**

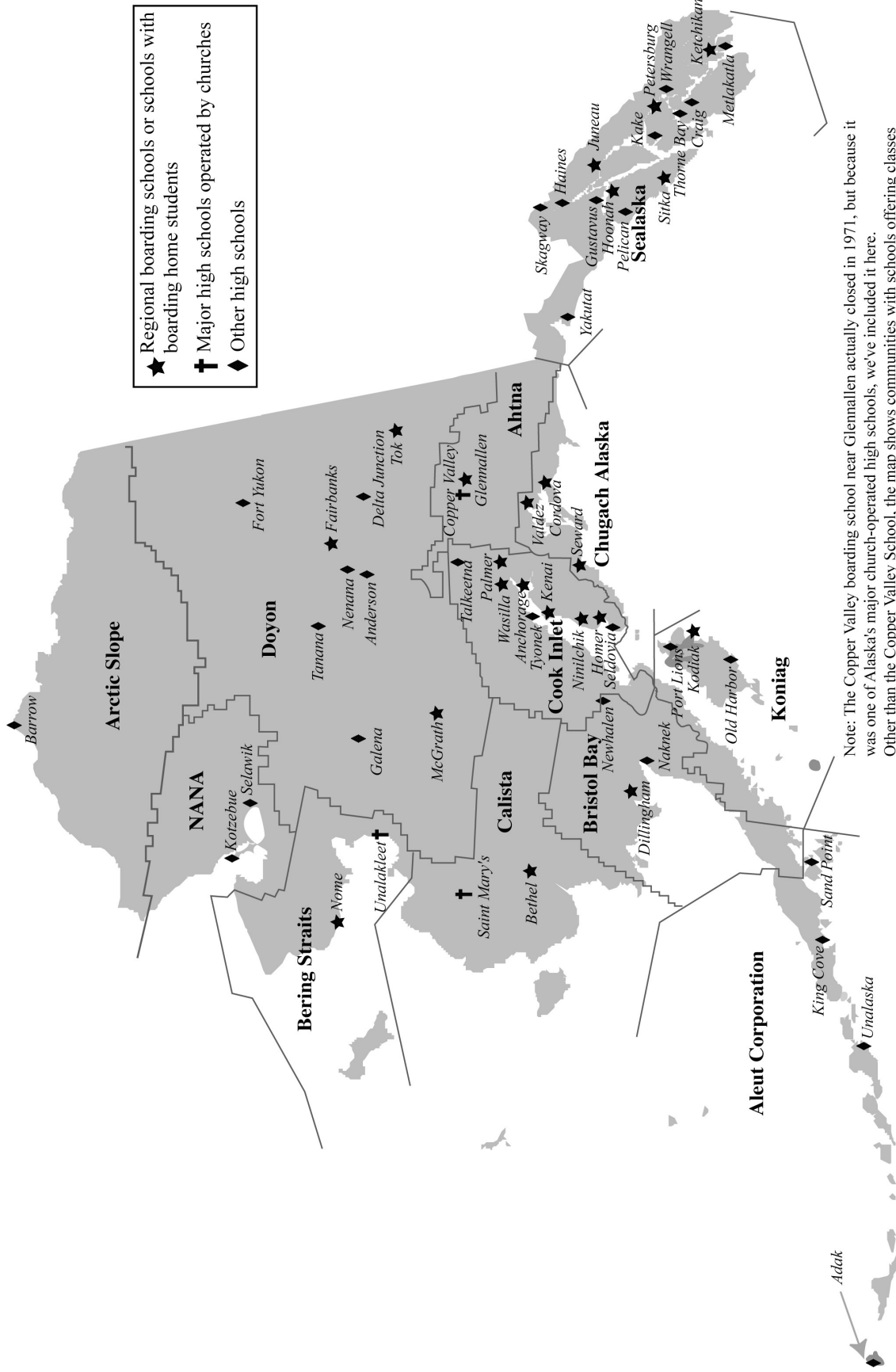
### **Establishment of Village High Schools**

Map 6-1 shows Alaska communities with high schools as of 1974. In those days, only a few Native communities had high school programs, and to attend high school, Alaska Native students from villages generally had to leave home for larger communities with either boarding schools or boarding home programs. Church groups also operated high schools in a few rural communities.

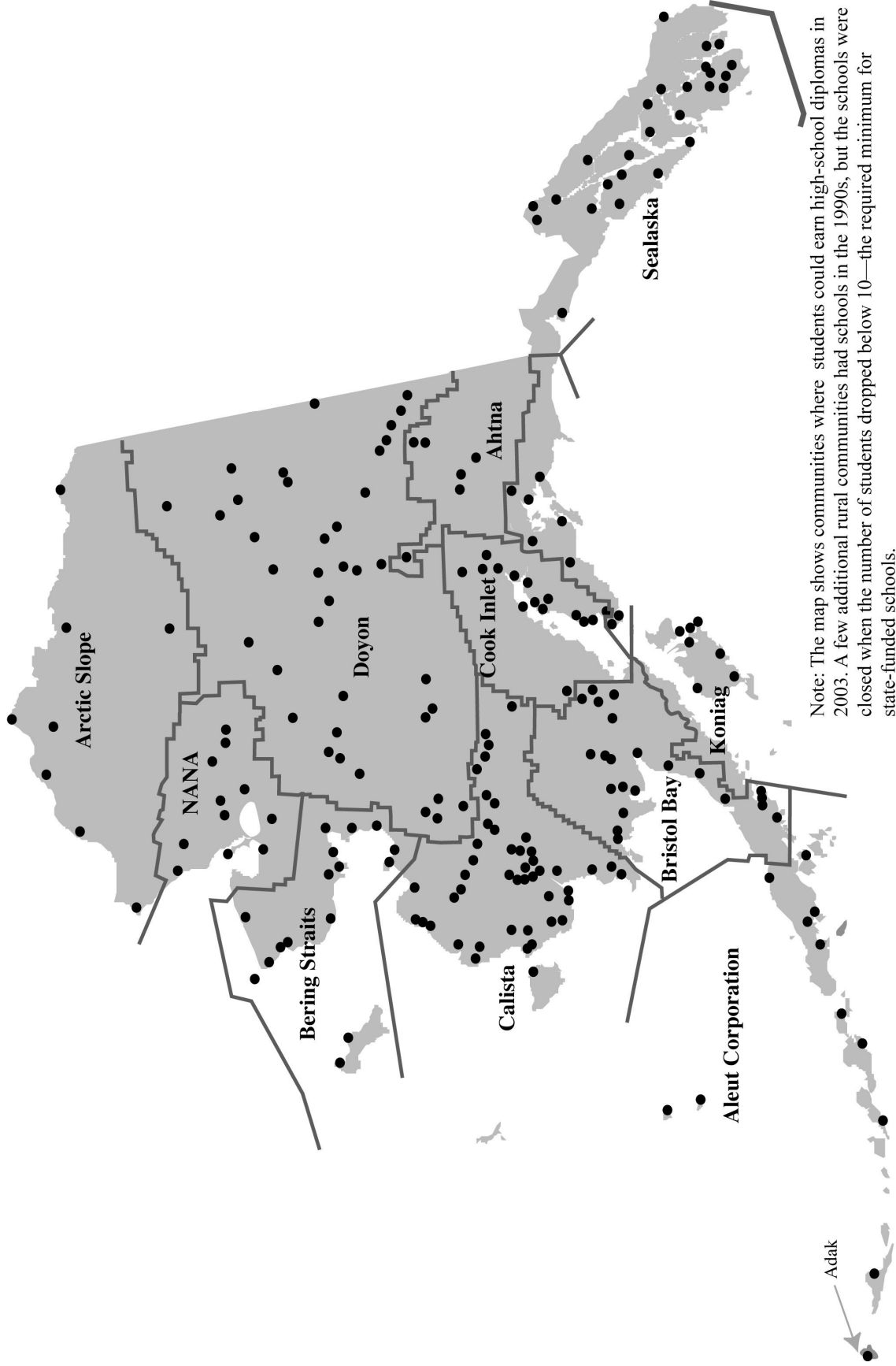
Then, in 1976, the state government settled a lawsuit rural Native students had brought against the state, for failing to provide them with equal access to education. The *Tobeluk v Lind* consent decree made it possible, for the first time, for thousands of Alaska Native students to attend high school in their home towns. The 1976 decree required the state government to establish high-school programs in over 100 Alaska villages, if local residents wanted them.

Local residents did want high schools, and the state built dozens of new high schools throughout rural Alaska over the next decade. Map 6-2 shows communities with high schools in 2003, when any community with more than 10 students was eligible for a high-school program.

Map 6-1. Alaska Communities with High Schools, 1974



Map 6-2. Alaska Communities with High Schools, 2003



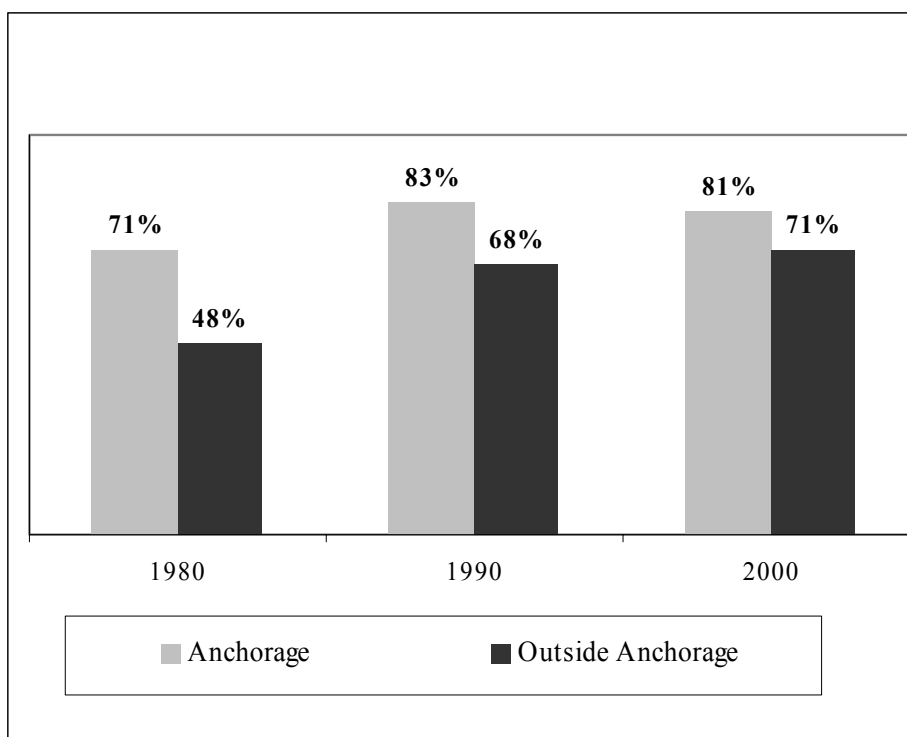
### Changes in Educational Attainment

The effects of the many new rural high schools are evident in data on educational attainment collected in U.S. censuses every 10 years. The individual data available from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 censuses don't allow us to look specifically at changes in rural Alaska over time. But we can separate data for Anchorage from data for the rest of Alaska and have an approximation of changes in rural Alaska over time.

The percentage of Alaska Natives outside Anchorage who had high-school diplomas rose sharply in the 1980s, increasing from 48 percent to 68 percent of Natives over age 20. The share also rose in the 1990s, but at a much slower pace, growing from 68 to 71 percent (Figure 6-1).

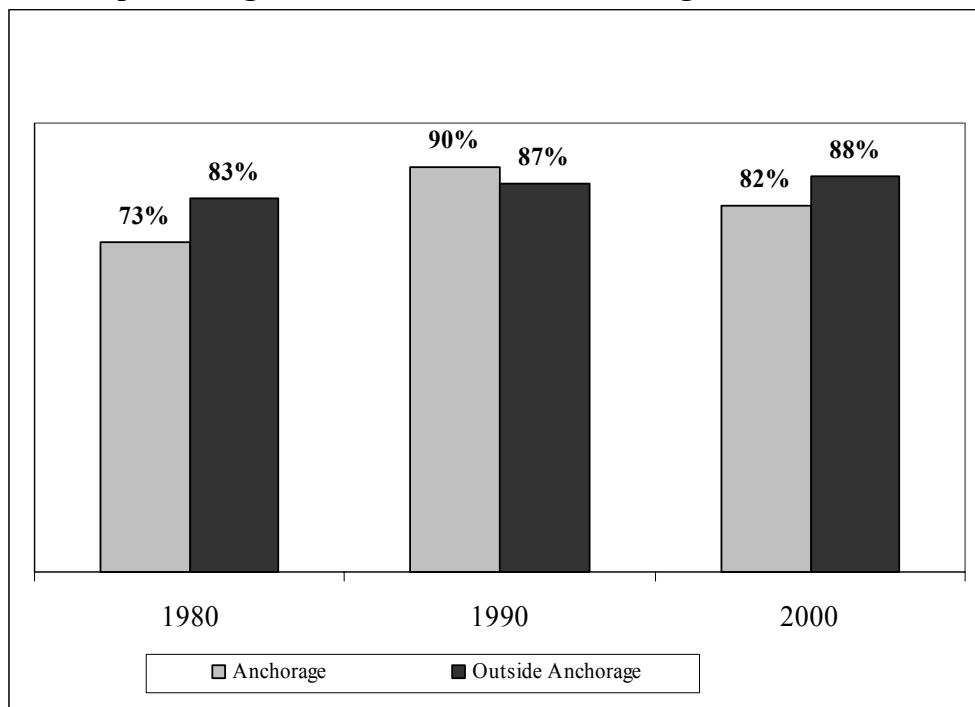
The percentage of teenage Natives—16 to 19 years old—living outside Anchorage and still in school or having graduated also rose in the 1980s, up from 83 to 87 percent (Figure 6-2). But as rural dropout rates increased in the 1990s, growth leveled off, standing at 88 percent in 2000.

**Figure 6-1. Share of Alaska Native Population, 20 years or Older, With at Least a High School Education, 1980-2000**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

**Figure 6-2. Share of Alaska Natives (Ages 16 to 19) Who Had Completed High School or were Still Attending School, 1980-2000**



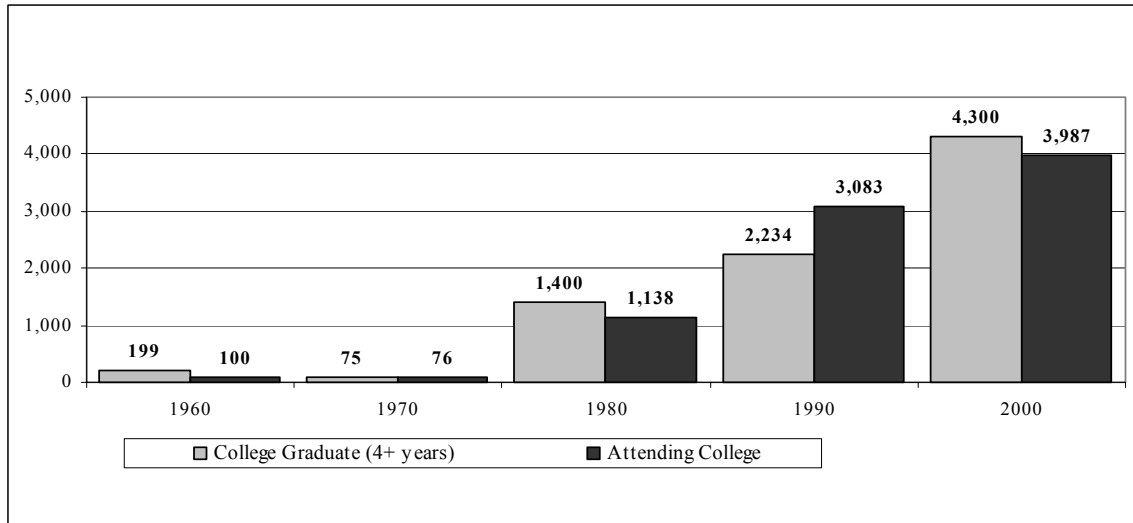
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Alaska Natives also attended and graduated from college in greater numbers through the 1990s. As Figure 6-3 shows, numbers of Native college graduates grew from under 200 in 1960 to more than 3,000 by 1990 and 4,300 by 2000. Numbers attending college also steadily increased, from fewer than 100 in 1960 to nearly 4,000 by 2000.

However, the great majority of Natives who attend college do not receive four-year degrees. This reflects not only the difficulties Natives face completing college (discussed later in the chapter) but also the many programs that end with certificates or two-year associate's degrees. Of the approximately 50,000 Alaska Natives who had completed high school in 2000, less than 10 percent had completed four-year degrees, but almost 40 percent had completed at least one year of college.

Table 6-1 compares the numbers of Alaska Natives who have completed at least some college with just the number of Natives who have graduated from high school. Figure 6-4 compares those who have completed some college with all Alaska Natives over 18—including both those who have graduated from high school and those who haven't.

**Figure 6-3. Numbers of Alaska Natives (19 and Older) Holding College Degrees or Attending College, 1960-2000**



Source and Notes: U.S. Decennial Census samples, IPUMS Database  
Data from 1960 is questionable; see note for Table 6-1.

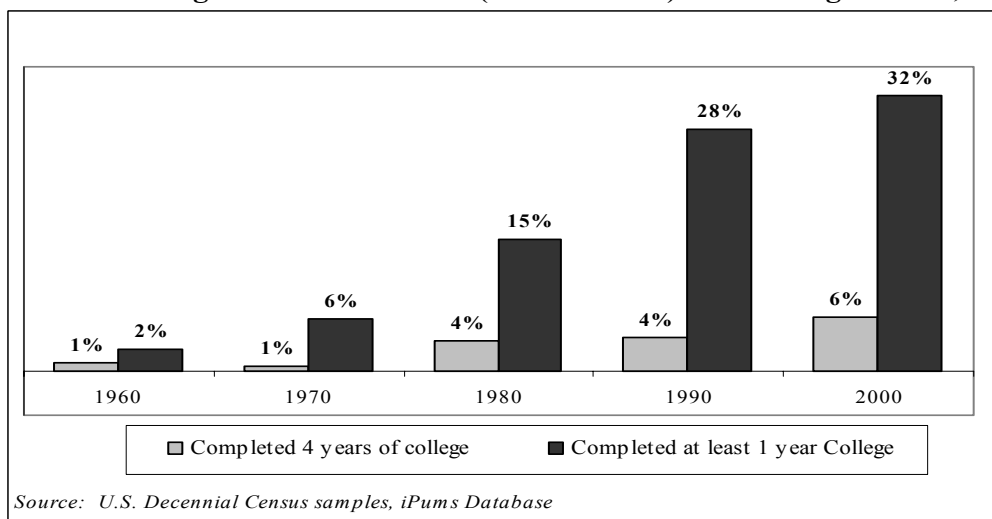
**Table 6-1. Numbers of Alaska Natives (Over 18) Who Had Completed High School, Attended Some College, or Held 4-Year Degrees, 1960-2000**

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Completed Grade 12	1,691	2,259	20,755	40,266	52,872
Percent of Native High School Graduates	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Completed at least 1 year college	499	677	6,002	15,624	21,851
Percent of Native High School Graduates	30%	30%	29%	39%	41%
Completed 4 years of college	199	75	1,400	2,234	4,300
Percent of Native High School Graduates	N/A*	3%	7%	6%	8%

\*The very small (unweighted) number of Natives in the 1960 sample—only about 200 Natives over 18, only 5 of those with any college—makes any weighted estimate for 1960 unreliable.

Source: U.S. Decennial Census, IPUMS Database

**Figure 6-4. Percentage of Alaska Natives (19 and Older) with College Credit, 1960-2000**



Source: U.S. Decennial Census samples, iPums Database

## **Continuing Challenges**

Despite these positive trends, there are still major hurdles in Alaska Native education. Below we look at the continuing challenges in several categories. Native educational attainment varies widely by region, and is a greater problem for Native men than Native women. High-school dropout rates are rising, especially in the last 5 years, and low achievement compared to non-Natives persists from elementary school through college over a variety of test measures.

### **Gender and Regional Disparities**

Statewide and in almost every region, Native women are more likely than Native men to attend college or to have some college credit. There are also considerable differences among the regions in the percentages of Alaska Natives either attending college or having at least some college credit.

Figure 6-5 shows that while slightly more Native men than women are enrolled in high school—52 percent compared with 48 percent in 2000—many more Native women continue on to college or graduate school. Of Alaska Natives in college in 2000, 58 percent were women.

Table 6-2 shows the number of Alaska Natives enrolled in college or graduate school in 2000, by gender and ANCSA region of residence. Remember that these numbers reflect where the students are living and not necessarily the regions they are from. (We don't have the data to estimate college attendance by students' home regions.) So all the Native students who may come from other regions to attend college on the large campuses in Anchorage and Fairbanks will be included in the Cook Inlet and Doyon regions. Native students from throughout the state who choose to attend college outside Alaska also don't appear in these data.

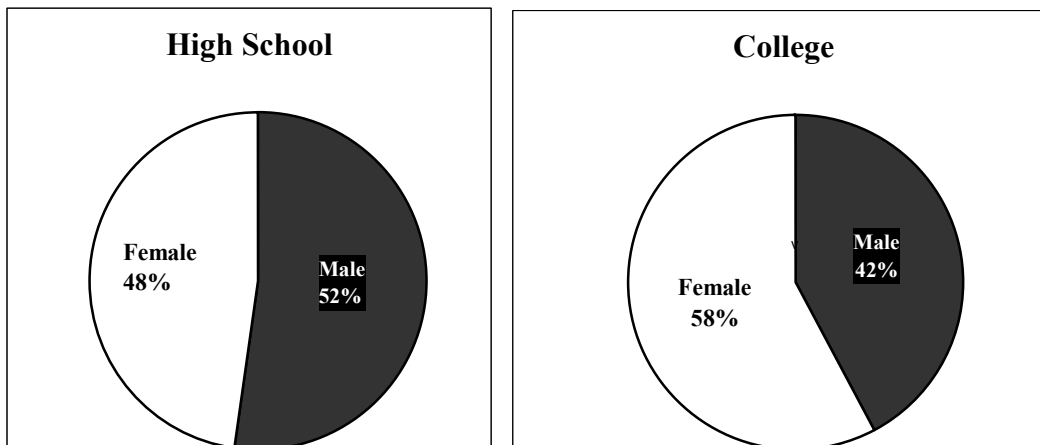
But even if we look at the regions without large campuses, there are still notable disparities. In the Arctic Slope, Bering Straits, and Bristol Bay regions, more than three percent of Natives were in college in 2000, while in Koniag and NANA the percentage was less than two. Chugach Alaska region stands out, with over 10 percent of resident Natives in college in 2000; Prince William Sound Community College in Valdez has a higher percentage of Alaska Natives in its student body than any other UAA campus.<sup>2</sup>

And in 9 of the 12 regions, more women than men were attending college in 2000.

---

<sup>2</sup> *UA in Review 2003*, Table 1.04, Headcount by Gender, Ethnicity and Campus, Fall, 2002.

**Figure 6-5. Shares of Alaska Native Men and Women Attending High School and College, 2000**



Source: U.S. Census 2000, American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File, PCT 61 and PCT 63

**Table 6-2. College and Graduate School Enrollment Among Alaska Native Men and Women, by ANCSA Region, 2000**

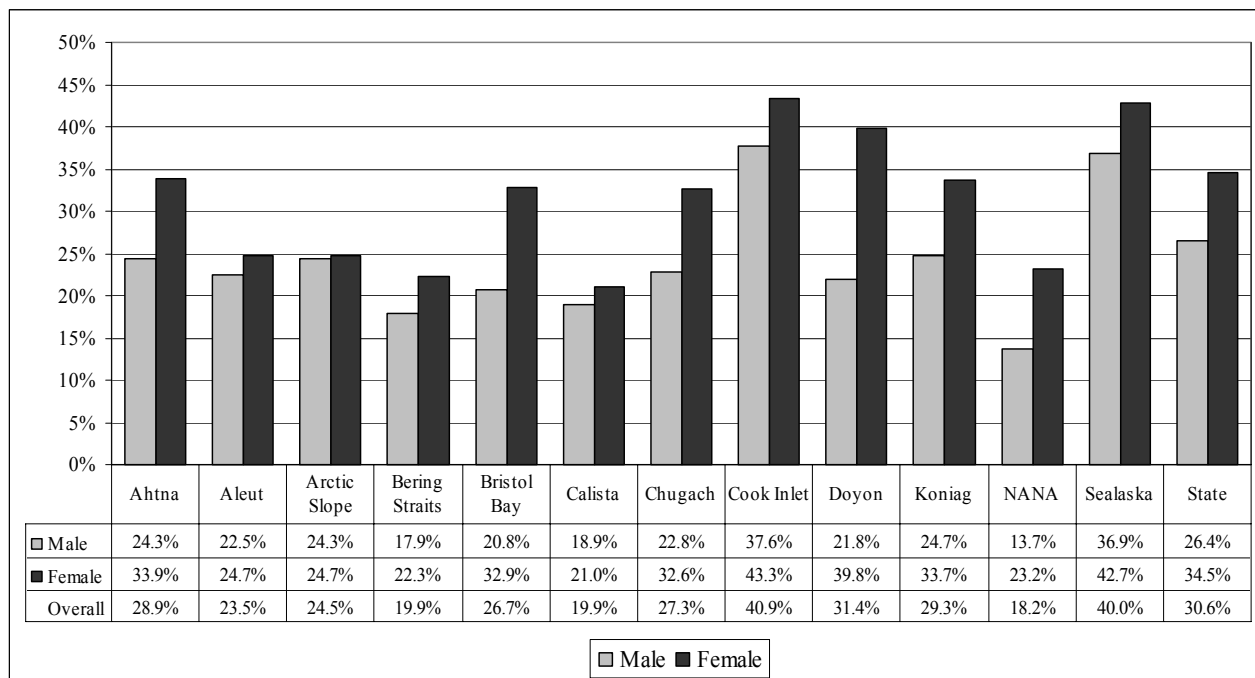
ANCSA Region	Alaska Native Population*			Alaska Natives Enrolled in College or Graduate School			
	Population	Enrolled in College	Percent Enrolled in College	Men	Women	Percent Men	Percent Women
Ahtna	455	8	1.8%	4	4	50%	50%
Aleut	1,680	48	2.9%	24	24	50%	50%
Arctic Slope	3,310	100	3.0%	30	70	30%	70%
Bering Straits	4,573	149	3.3%	49	100	33%	67%
Bristol Bay	3,430	109	3.2%	37	72	34%	66%
Calista	12,239	273	2.2%	84	189	31%	69%
Chugach	1,296	139	10.7%	82	57	59%	41%
Cook Inlet	17,462	1157	6.6%	375	782	32%	68%
Doyon	7,630	579	7.6%	143	436	25%	75%
Koniag	1,281	20	1.6%	7	13	35%	65%
NANA	3,709	66	1.8%	31	35	47%	53%
Sealaska	8,039	490	6.1%	205	285	42%	58%
Total	65,104	3138	4.8%	1071	2067	34%	66%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File, PCT 61

\* For this table, Alaska Native means a resident of Alaska who chose only "Alaska Native/American Indian" race in the 2000 U.S. census.

Figure 6-6 shows percentages of Native men and women, by region, with at least some college credit. In 2000, Alaska Natives in the Sealaska and Cook Inlet regions were most likely to have some college credit, and those in NANA, the Bering Straits, and Calista the least likely. And in every region, more Native women than men had at least some college credit. In some regions—NANA, Doyon, Bristol Bay, and Chugach—the disparity between men and women was 10 percentage points or more.

**Figure 6-6. Shares of Alaska Native Men and Women With Some College Credit, by Region, 2000**

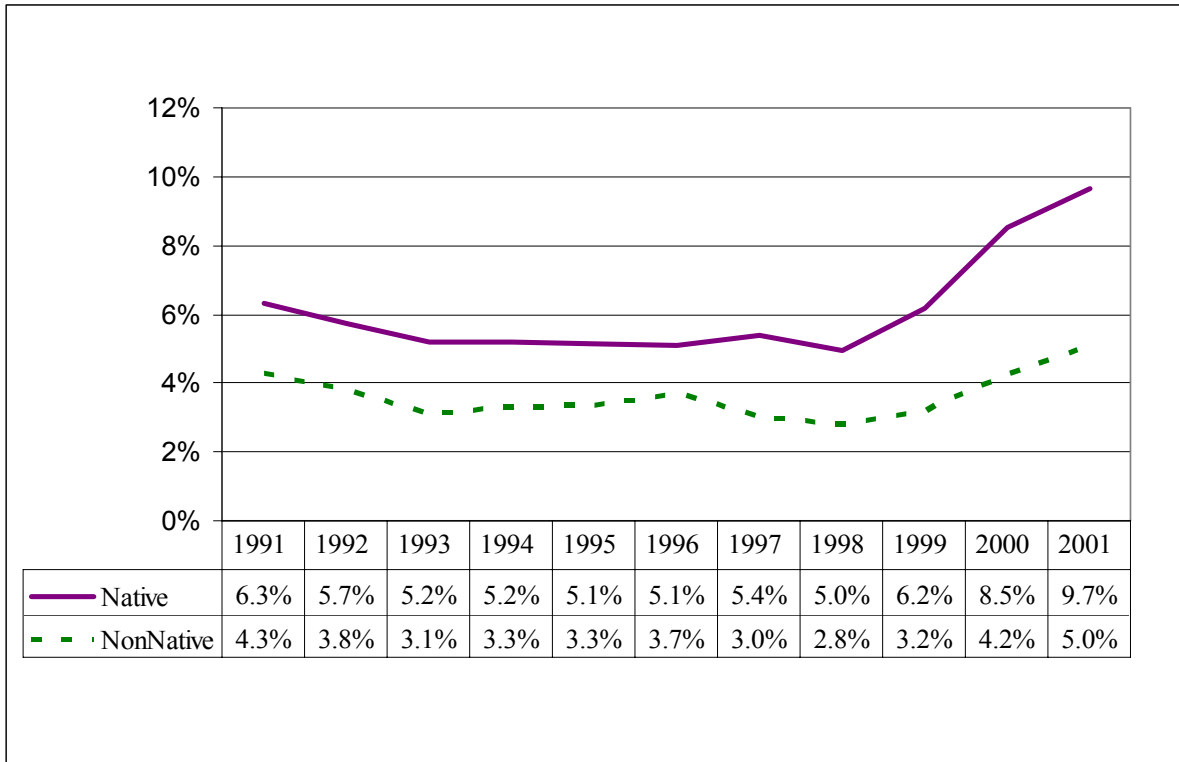


Source: U.S. Census 2000. American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File, PCT 64

### Rising Dropout Rates

Figures 6-1 and 6-2 documented big gains in the share of Alaska Natives completing high school over the past 40 years. However, in the last decade, the upward trend has slowed and in some cases reversed. Dropout rates for all Alaska students have increased since 1998, and rates among Native students have climbed somewhat faster than among non-Natives (Figure 6-7).

**Figure 6-7. Dropout Rates, Alaska Native and Non-Native Students, 1991 to 2001**

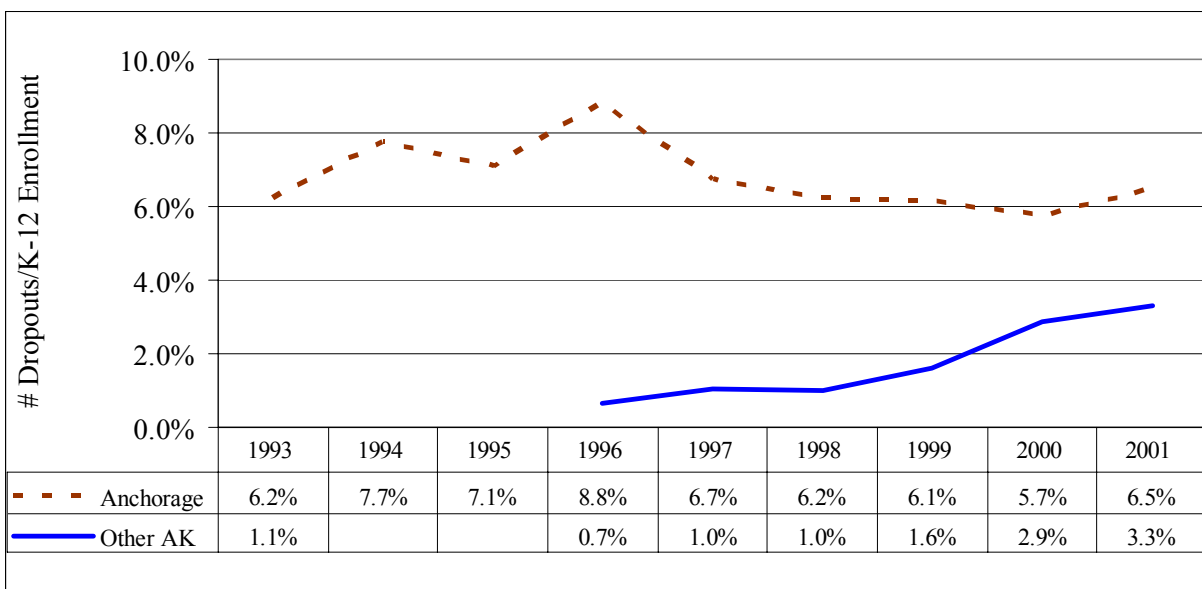


*Source: Alaska DEED: Report Cards to the Public 1993-2001 and District Dropout Rates, 1991-2000 Annual Number of Dropouts/Grade 7-12 Enrollment*

Dropout rates at rural schools have increased substantially in recent years. Rural schools had enjoyed very low dropout rates in the early 1990s—less than two percent—but those rates have been climbing. Figure 6-8 shows dropout rates from 1993-2001 for Native students in Anchorage and elsewhere in Alaska. Although the Anchorage rates remained much higher than rural rates in 2001, the Anchorage rates didn’t change much in the 1990s—while dropout rates outside Anchorage clearly increased.

Several reasons have been suggested for the growing rural dropout rates. When rural high schools were built in the 1980s, they enjoyed a honeymoon period of high community support. However, high teacher turnover, poor community relations, and graduates who proved inadequately prepared for work or for college have eroded this support for some schools. Increasing emphasis on standardized testing can also discourage Native students who perform poorly on those tests. Finally, the imposition of a mandatory high-school graduation qualifying exam may have convinced some students that they wouldn’t graduate anyway and that they might as well drop out.

**Figure 6-8. Dropout Rates among Alaska Native Students in Anchorage and the Remainder of Alaska, 1993-2001**

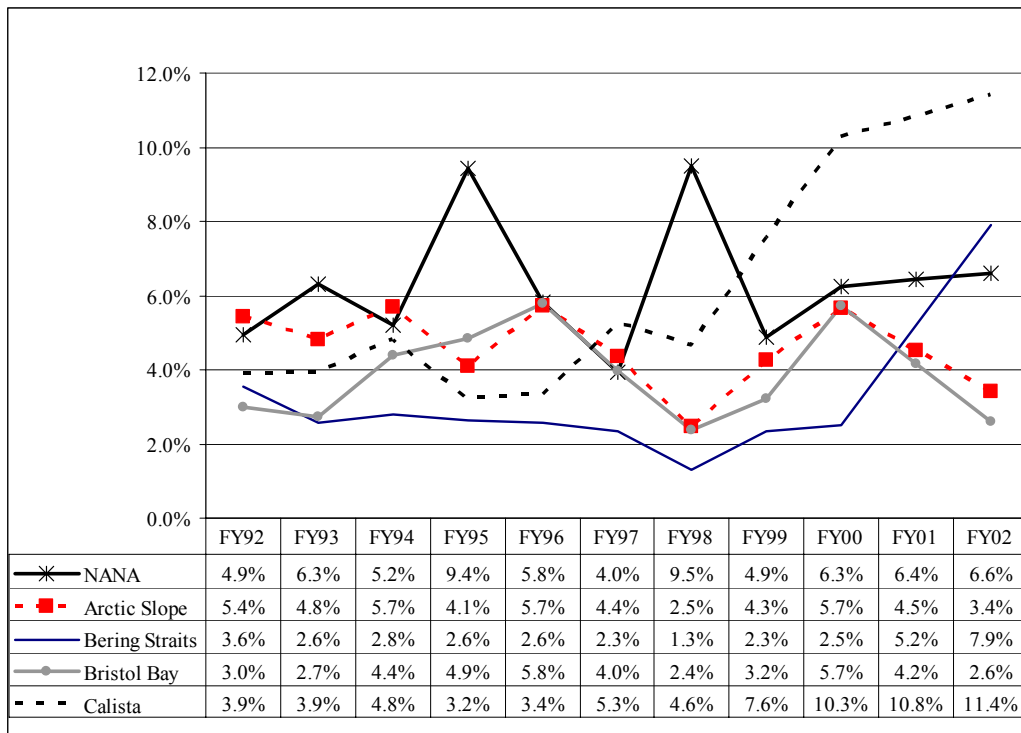


Source: Alaska DEED: Report Cards to the Public 1993-2001 and District Dropout Rates, 1991-2000 Annual Number of Dropouts/Grade 7-12 Enrollment

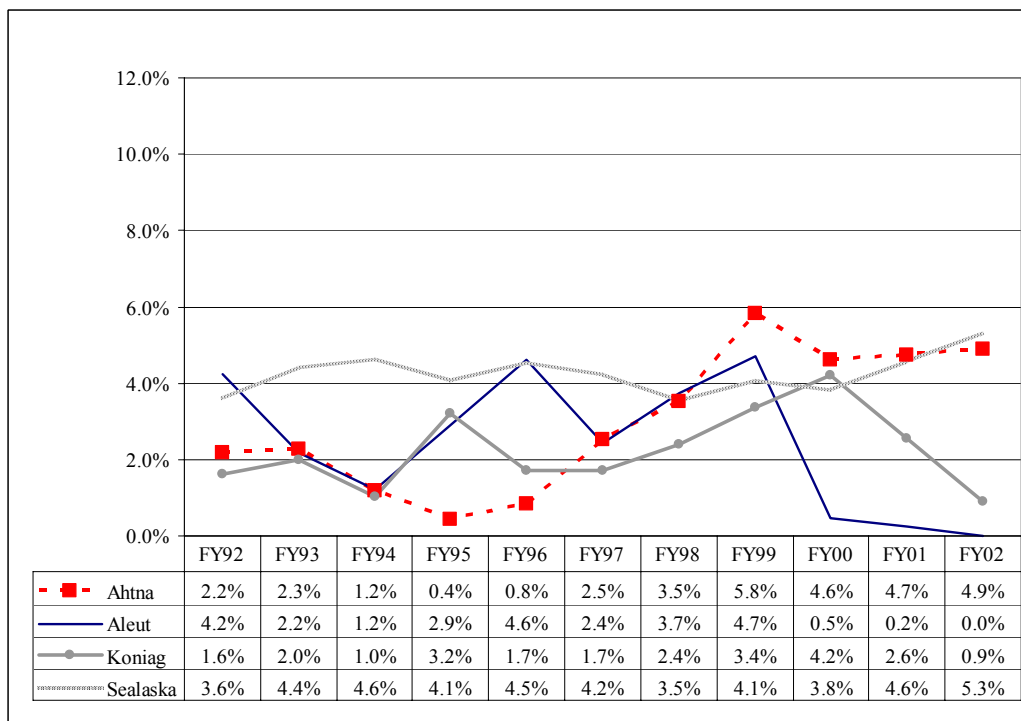
Figures 6-9 through 6-11 show dropout rates among the ANCSA regions, with regions grouped by their proportion of Native enrollment. Figure 6-12 compares rates in regions with higher and lower Native enrollment. Keep in mind that these dropout figures by region are total rates, among both Native and non-Native students. We could not get dropout figures for just Native students by ANCSA region.

The figures vary from region to region and from year to year. But Figure 6-12 shows the overall pattern. While dropout rates among all regions were fairly close in 1992, by 2002 the regions with the highest Native enrollment had a significantly higher dropout rate. Regions with 20 to 60 percent Native enrollment had the lowest dropout rate. And the regions with less than 20 percent Native enrollment—including Cook Inlet and Doyon—had dropout rates between the high and the low; those regions include Anchorage and Fairbanks.

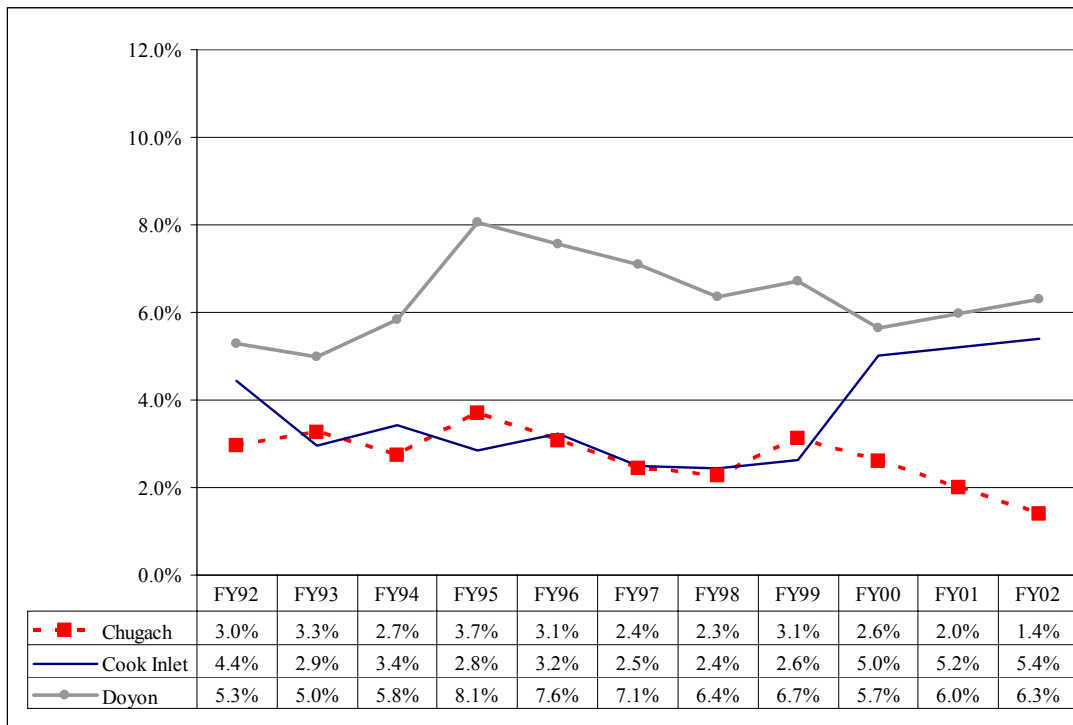
**Figure 6-9. Dropout Rate, ANCSA Regions with at Least 80 Percent Native Enrollment, 1992-2002**



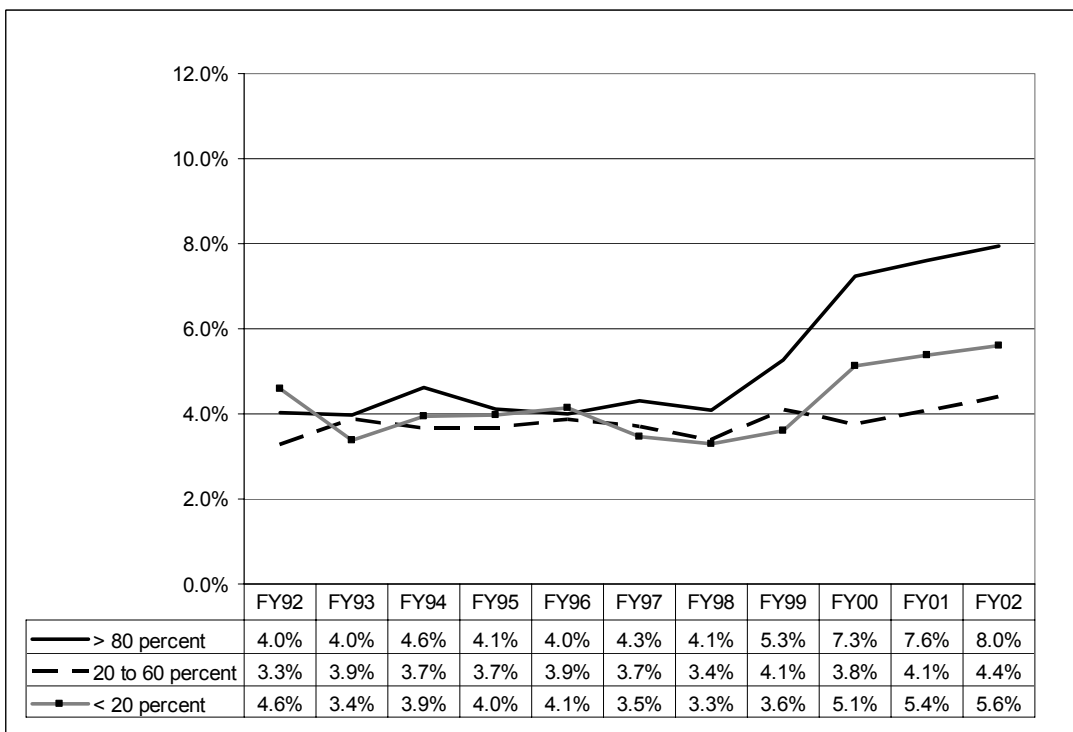
**Figure 6-10. Dropout Rate, ANCSA Regions with 20 to 60 Percent Native Enrollment, 1992-2002**



**Figure 6-11. Dropout Rate, ANCSA Regions with Less than 20 Percent Native Enrollment, 1992-2002**



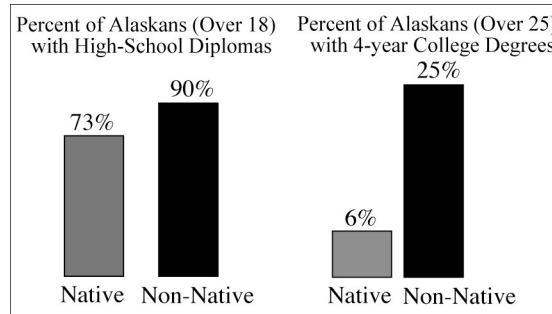
**Figure 6-12. Dropout Rates among Regions with Higher and Lower Native Enrollment, 1992 to 2000**



### Low Achievement

Although more and more Alaska Natives have completed high school and college since 1960, Native educational attainment is still well below that of non-Native Alaskans. As Figure 6-13 shows, Natives are still somewhat less likely than non-Natives to have completed high school, and much less likely to have completed a four-year college degree. Furthermore, it's not enough that students attend school and receive diplomas. Education should prepare students to succeed as adults. It's not clear that schools are doing this for Alaska Native children, if we use low test scores and low college success as measures.

**Figure 6-13. Educational Attainment of Adult Alaskans, 2000**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

### Test Scores

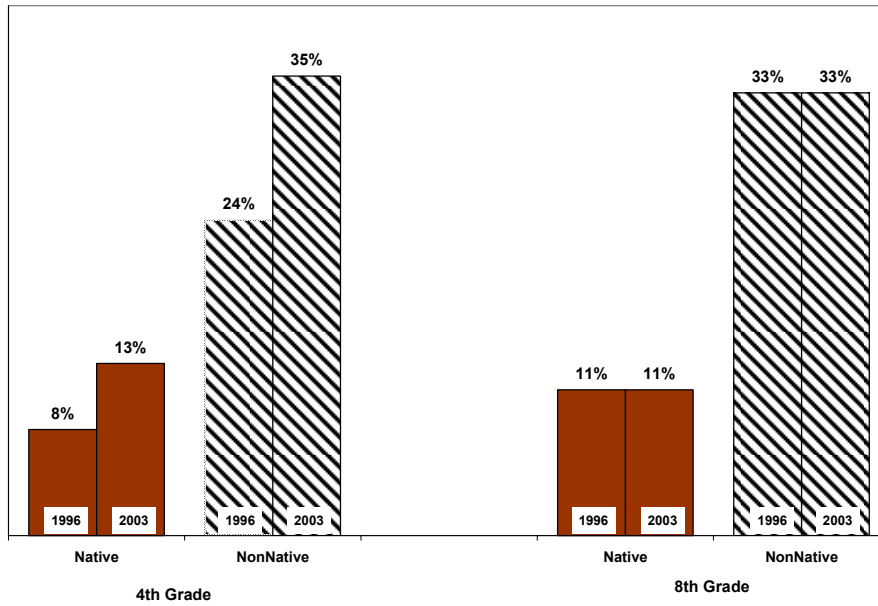
One way of measuring schools' success in educating students is through standardized test scores. While standardized tests don't measure every important aspect of what we want students to learn, the things they do measure—typically basic reading, writing, and math skills—are important. Alaska Native students' scores on standardized tests are on average substantially below those of non-Native students. Because of changes both in tests used and in how results are reported, it's difficult to see how this disparity has changed over time. What is clear is that low achievement scores have been and continue to be a problem for Alaska Native students.

Alaska participated in the mathematics and science portions of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1996 and in the reading and mathematics portions in 2003. The NAEP, conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), is a set of continuing assessments in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and the arts. It uses a nationally representative sample, and since 1990 it has also drawn separate state-representative samples of students from states that participate.

Figure 6-14 shows the proportion of Native and non-Native students who scored at the proficient level or above in math in 1996 and in 2003. More of both Native and non-Native fourth graders scored as proficient in math in 2003 than in 1996. But neither Native nor non-Native eighth graders gained in math between 1996 and 2003. And in both grades and in both years, non-Native students were about three times as likely as Natives to score proficient or better in math.

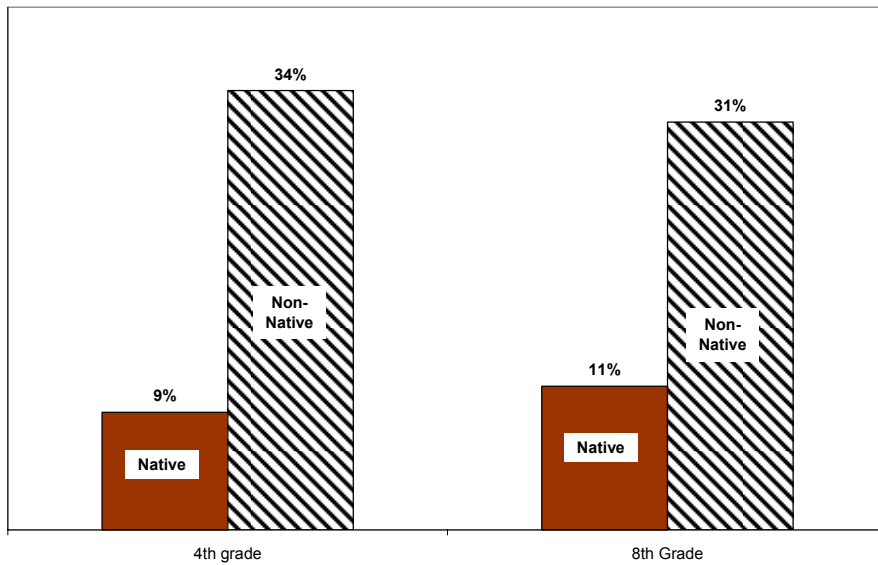
Figure 6-15 shows that in 2003, the disparity between Native and non-Native students was just as great in reading as in math. Non-Native fourth graders were almost four times more likely to pass the reading test as Native fourth graders, and non-Native eighth graders were almost three times as likely to pass.

**Figure 6-14. Percentage of Alaska Students Scoring Proficient or Above, NAEP Mathematics, 1996 and 2003**



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

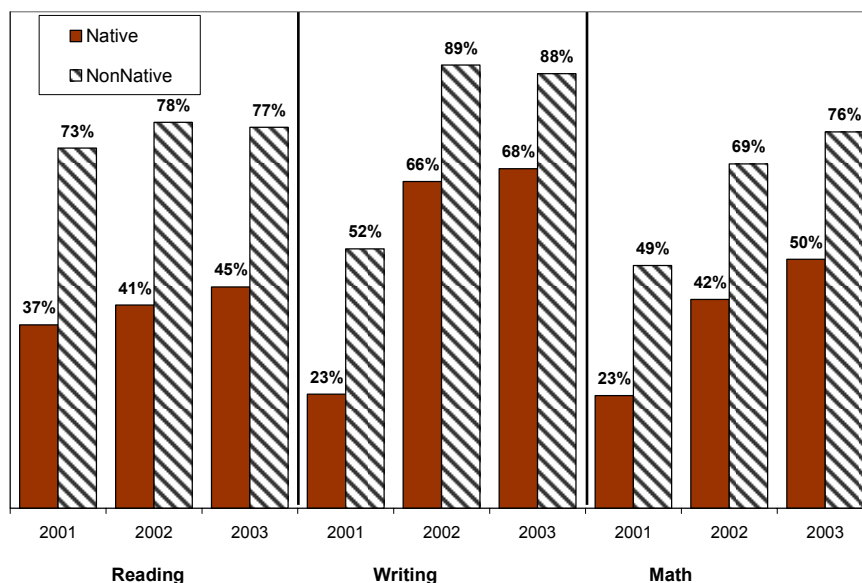
**Figure 6-15. Percentage of Alaska Students Scoring Proficient or Above, NAEP Reading, 2003**



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Since 2001, Alaska has implemented statewide benchmark exams in the third, sixth, and eighth grades, as well as a high-school graduation qualifying exam (HSGQE) in the tenth grade. (Students who don't pass the first time can retake the exam in eleventh and twelfth grades.) As we'll see in the figures below, more Alaska students have scored as proficient under Alaska benchmark and HSGQE standards than under the NAEP standards. And the discrepancy between Native and non-Native scores is not as great in the Alaska tests as in the NAEP tests—but it is still persistently large, as Figure 6-16 shows.

**Figure 6-16. Percentage of Tenth Graders Proficient on Alaska High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam, by Ethnicity and Year**



Source: Alaska Department of Education

Among tenth graders taking the HSGQE for the first time, non-Natives have been more likely to score proficient in every area. That's especially true in the reading section, where non-Natives are almost twice as likely to pass as Natives. Among eleventh and twelfth graders—most of whom have already taken and failed the tests at least once—non-Natives are two to three times more likely than Natives to pass on a reading re-test.<sup>3</sup> The discrepancy is smaller among Native and non-Native students re-taking the writing and math portions of the test, but it is still large (Figure 6-17).

The achievement gaps evident in the high-school tests are also evident in earlier grades. In the third-, sixth-, and eighth-grade benchmark tests, the proportion of non-Native students scoring proficient is sometimes twice as high as among Native students (Figures 6-18 through 6-20).

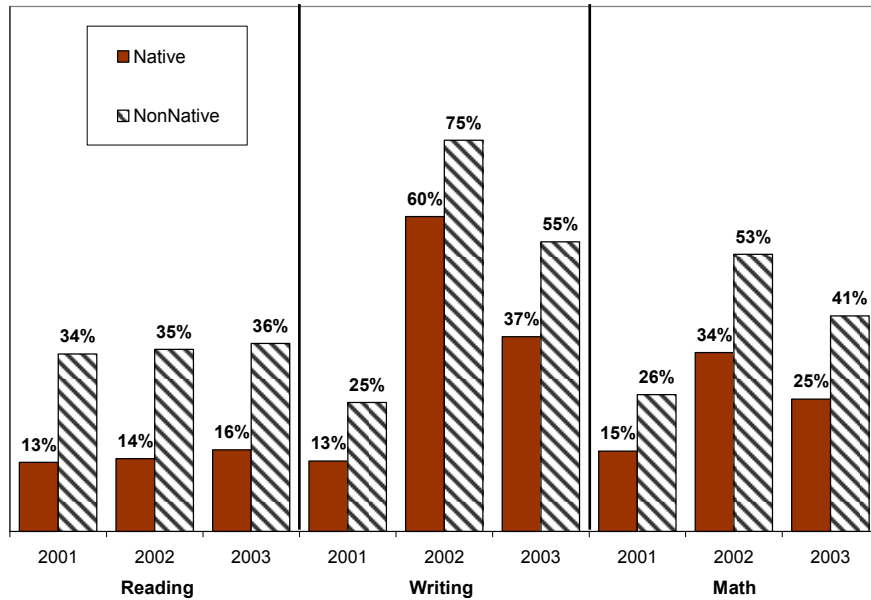
Typically, 40 to 60 percent of Alaska Native students score as proficient across the four tests (third-, sixth-, and eighth-grade benchmarks and HSGQE) and the three subjects (reading, writing, and math), compared to 70 to 80 percent of non-Native students.

<sup>3</sup> While this likely indicates that remedial measures are more effective for non-Native than for Native students, it may also indicate that more non-Native 11th and 12th graders are new to the state, and are thus first-time test takers.

Assessing changes in achievement over time (2001 to 2003) and across grades is difficult. The tests are different across grades and not directly comparable. “Proficient” for a third grader may have little relationship to “proficient” for an eighth grader. For example, in 2001 only 20 percent of eighth grade Alaska Native students scored proficient in math; two years later, 50 percent of those same students scored proficient in math in their tenth grade HSGQE. It’s unlikely that all of them “caught up” in math in ninth and tenth grades. It’s more likely that the eighth grade benchmark standards and the tenth grade HSGQE standards are different.

Also, the scores set for “proficient” have changed in some cases, especially on the HSGQE. Note that the percentage of high-school students proficient in math and writing jumped when the 2002 test used lower passing scores in those areas than the 2001 test.

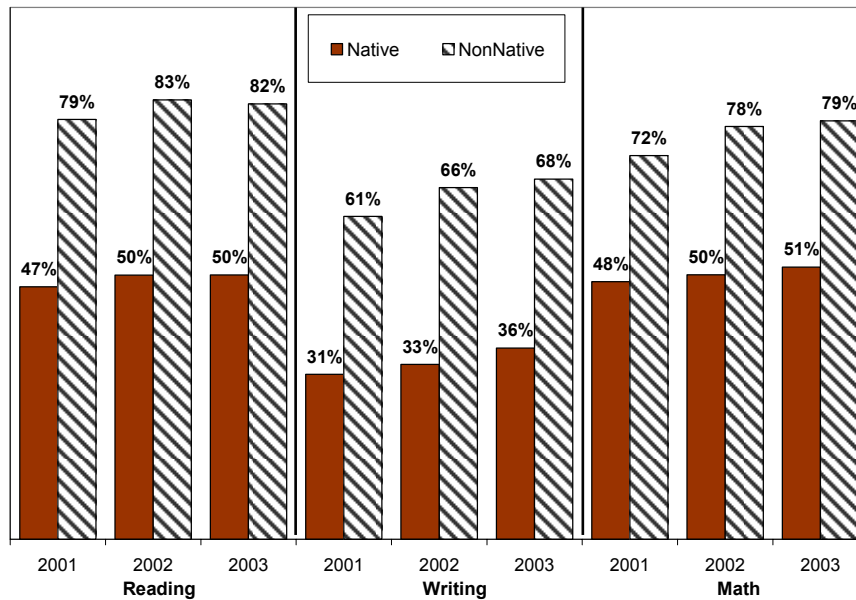
**Figure 6-17. Percentage of Tested 11th and 12th Graders Proficient on High-School Graduation Qualifying Exam, by Ethnicity and Year**



Source: Alaska Department of Education

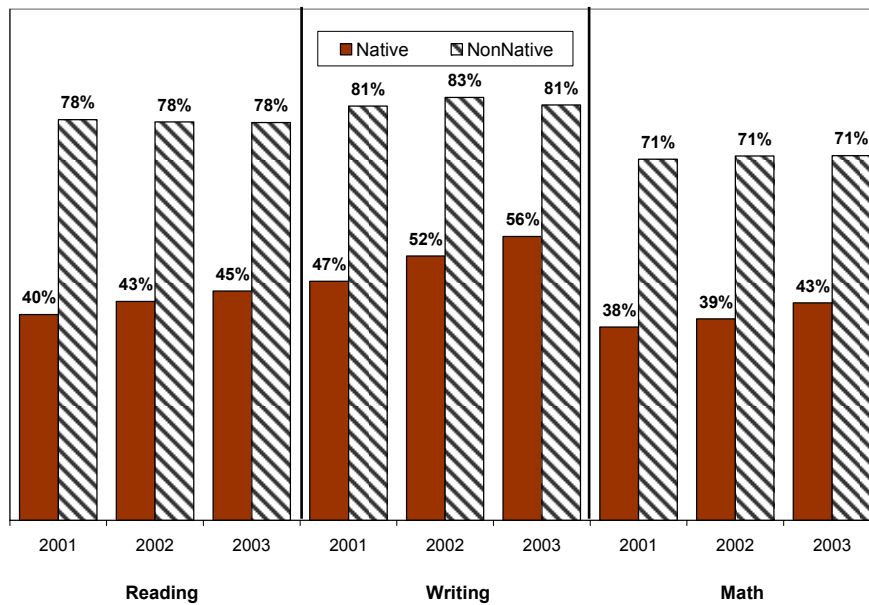
Note: These numbers include only those students who took the test as 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> graders, and do not include those students who had already passed the test.

**Figure 6-18. Percentage of Students Proficient or Better on Third-Grade Benchmark Exams, by Ethnicity and Year**



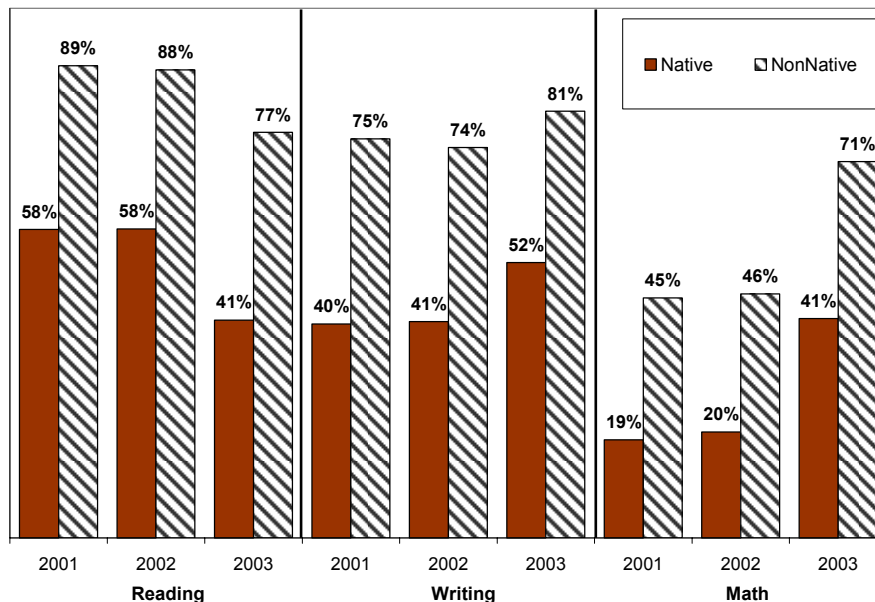
Source: Alaska Department of Education

**Figure 6-19. Percentage of Students Proficient or Above on Sixth-Grade Benchmark Exams, by Ethnicity and Year**



Source: Alaska Department of Education

**Figure 6-20. Percentage of Students Proficient or Above on Eighth-Grade Benchmark Exams, by Ethnicity and Year**



Source: Alaska Department of Education

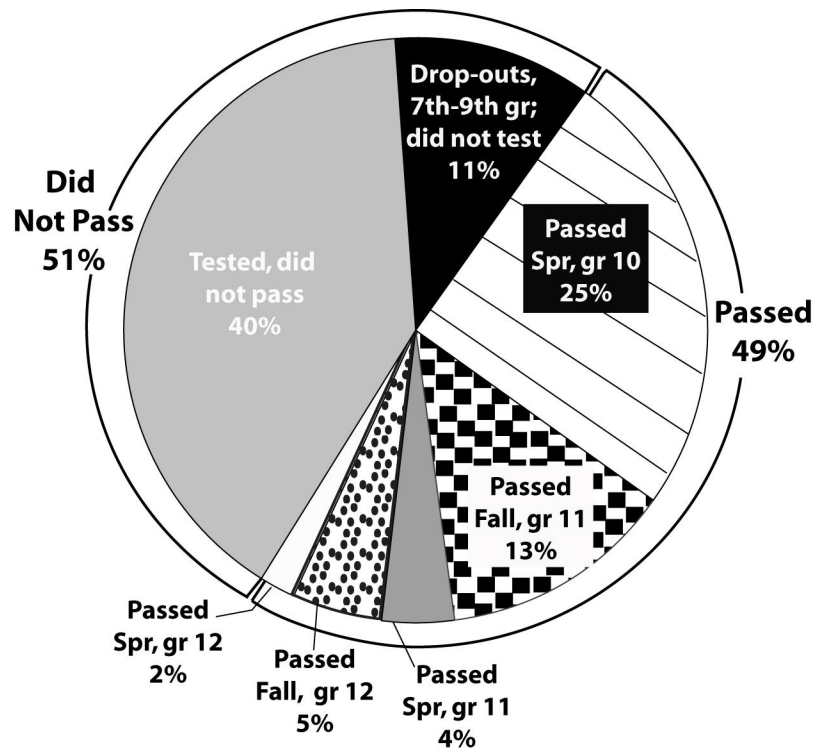
The low number of Native students scoring as proficient indicates that public schools are not preparing these students to succeed in post-secondary education and the job market. While standardized tests have many pitfalls—and are clearly not a complete measure of student competence—what they do measure is important. Students who cannot pass the HSGQE reading or writing portions may also have trouble completing college and job applications; failing any portion of the test may indicate the student is not ready for post-secondary academic work. Those students must spend extra time and money on remedial work in college before starting on their degree requirements, introducing one more barrier to attaining a degree or certificate.

To accurately measure how many Native students fail the reading portion of the HSGQE, we would ideally also include those students who drop out without ever even taking the tests. We attempted to do that with publicly available data; the results are in Figure 6-21. It shows how many Native students who were in the seventh grade in the 1997-98 school year—who should have graduated in the spring of 2003—ultimately passed the reading section of the HSGQE. For a number of reasons, the percentages shown in Figure 6-21 really are estimates; still, we think they're reasonable estimates.<sup>4</sup>

Just under half of that group of students passed the reading portion of the HSGQE by spring 2003. About one in ten dropped out before even attempting the HSGQE. Of those who did take the test, about half eventually passed.

<sup>4</sup> This is necessarily an estimate. Dropouts are not typically reported by grade, so we used two different methods of estimating how many students dropped out before initial tenth-grade testing. And some students may have stayed in school for a seventh secondary year and passed the test in Fall 2003. Finally, this group of students may not be representative of Native students generally. Nevertheless, we think the available data were adequate to support a general estimate.

**Figure 6-21. How Many of the 1997-98 Alaska Native Seventh Graders Have Passed the Reading Section of the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE)?**



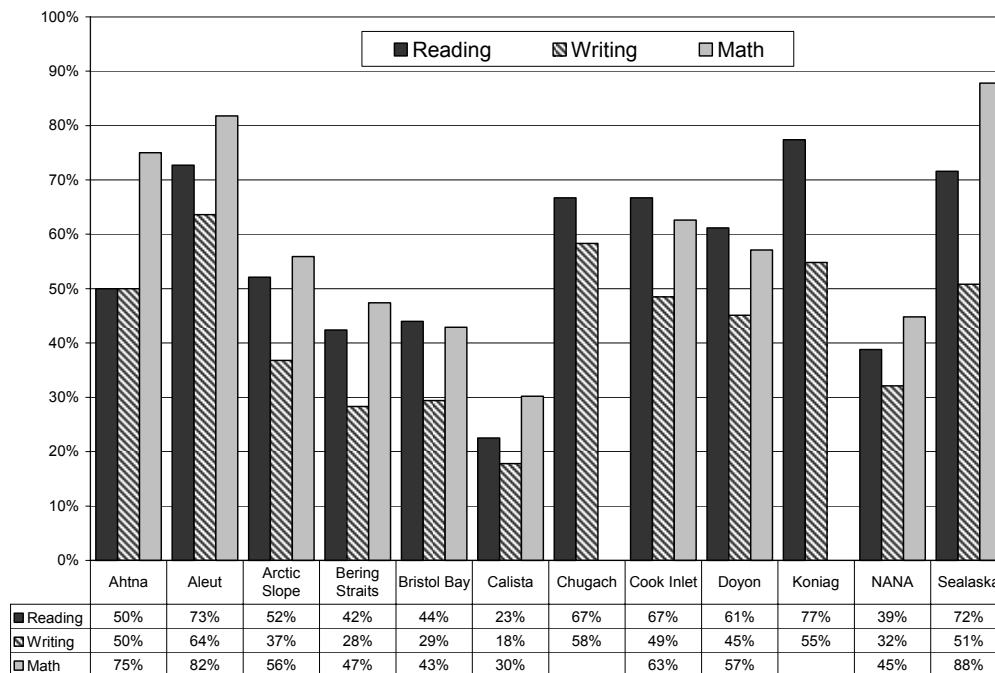
Source: Alaska Department of Education, HSGQE results by Ethnicity and Grade, 2001, 2002, 2003, and Dropouts by ethnicity, 1997, 1998, 1999

Figure 6-21 is only an estimate of how many Native students don't complete high school. Students who had not passed the test by Spring 2003 were eligible for several more attempts, whether they remained in high school or not. Some of the 40 percent who had not passed by their 12<sup>th</sup> grade spring have probably passed the test (and completed other unmet graduation requirements, if any) and graduated since June 2003. On the other hand, some of the 49 percent who passed the test either dropped out or failed to meet other graduation requirements, and so did not graduate. Available data don't allow us to accurately track cohorts of students, but these data indicate that over time as many as half of all Native students fail to finish high school for one reason or another—a figure much higher than published graduation rates and dropout rates would indicate.

### **Regional Variation**

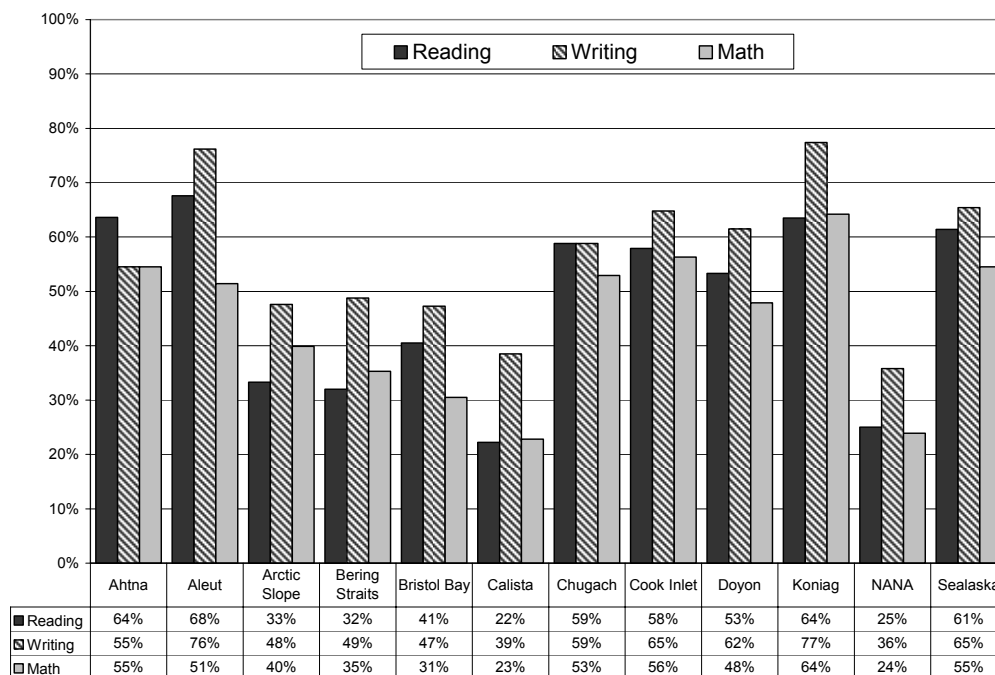
The benchmark and HSGQE test results also vary by region. The McDowell Group, in *Alaska Native K-12 Education Indicators*, reported results for the 2003 standardized tests by ANCSA region. Below, we present those results, in one graph for each grade, so we can compare ANCSA regions (Figures 6-22 through 6-25).

**Figure 6-22. Percentage of Native Students Scoring Proficient on Third-Grade Benchmark Exam, by ANCSA Region, 2003**



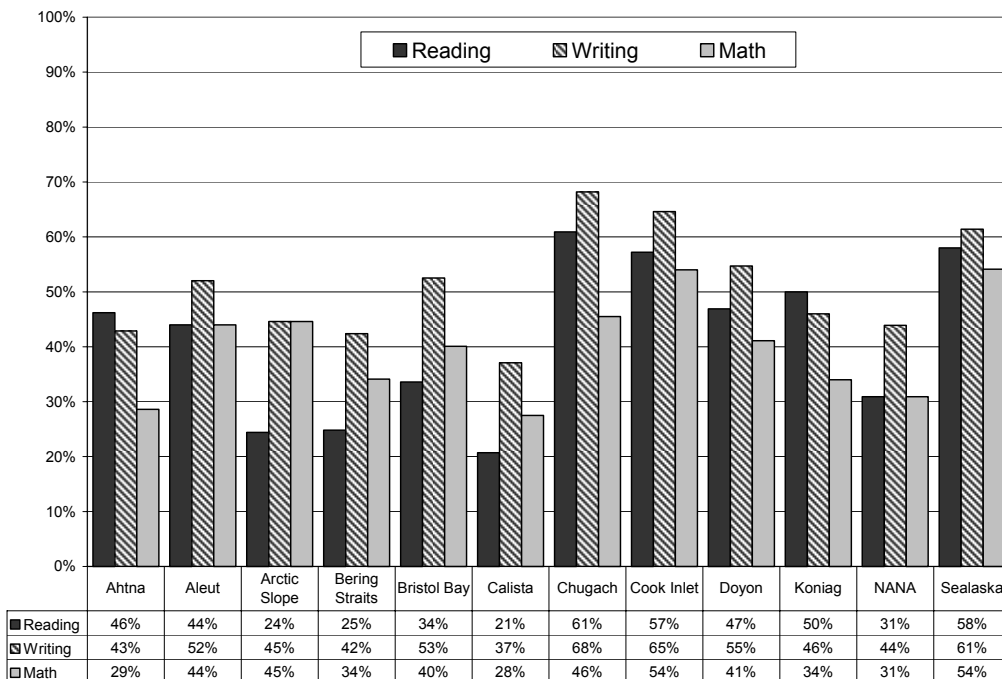
Source: Alaska DEED 2003 Benchmark Results by school district; ISER analysis

**Figure 6-23. Percentage of Native Students Scoring Proficient on Sixth-Grade Benchmark Exam, by ANCSA Region, 2003**



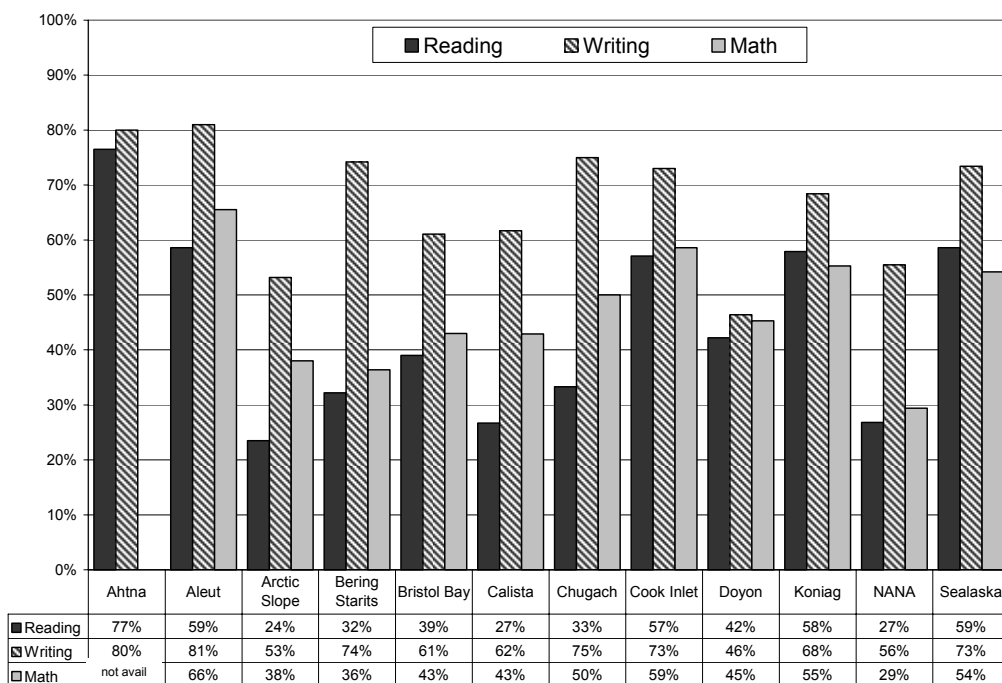
Source: Alaska DEED 2003 Benchmark Results by school district; ISER analysis

**Figure 6-24. Percentage of Native Students Scoring Proficient on Eighth-Grade Benchmark Exam, by ANCSA Region, 2003**



Source: Alaska DEED 2003 Benchmark Results by school district; ISER analysis

**Figure 6-25. Percentage of Native Tenth Graders Proficient on HSGQE by ANCSA Region, 2003**



Source: Alaska DEED 2003 Benchmark Results by school district; ISER analysis

It's very difficult to generalize across several grades, different test sections, and twelve regions. But broadly speaking, Native students scored better in third and sixth grade than in eighth grade. In particular, third graders in the Aleut, Koniag, and Sealaska regions did well in math, with 75 percent or more of students scoring proficient. By eighth grade, students in the Chugach and Cook Inlet regions scored highest in reading, with more than 65 percent testing as proficient.

On the HSGQE, tenth graders in the Ahtna region scored by far the highest on the reading section, with more than 75 percent testing proficient in 2003. Students in the Ahtna, Aleut, Chugach, Cook Inlet, and Sealaska regions scored highest in the writing section, with between 70 and 80 percent testing proficient. Tenth graders in the Aleut region scored best on the math section, with 66 percent proficient.

### ***Success in College***

Low achievement in high school affects Alaska Natives both in post-secondary education and in the labor force. Chapter 4 of this report discusses issues related to employment (as well as the scarcity of jobs in many Native communities). Earlier in this chapter we showed that the percentage of Alaska Natives earning college degrees was smaller than that among non-Natives. This disparity results both from fewer Alaska Natives enrolling in college and from lower success rates among those who do enroll.

The Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment at the University of Alaska Anchorage recently studied student persistence and graduation rates at UAA, particularly among Alaska Native and American Indian students and concluded:

Native/Indian undergraduate candidates arrive at UAA poorly prepared for college. Their high-school grade point averages run a full letter grade behind the rest of UAA, and they test lower on both the SAT and the ASSET tests. . . . Undergraduate retention rates are considerably below the UAA average for Natives and Indians, and their graduation rates are very low.<sup>5</sup>

Additional work by the same office found:

The Alaska Native cohort is at most risk of all ethnic groups. Although nearly 4 in 10 students continue for their second year, only 6 percent receive a degree, either associate or baccalaureate, in five years. An additional 1 percent earns it in six years.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 6-26 compares the status, five years after enrollment, of 239 Alaska Natives and 1,730 students of all ethnicities who enrolled as first-time, degree-seeking freshmen in the fall semesters of 1993, 1994, and 1995.

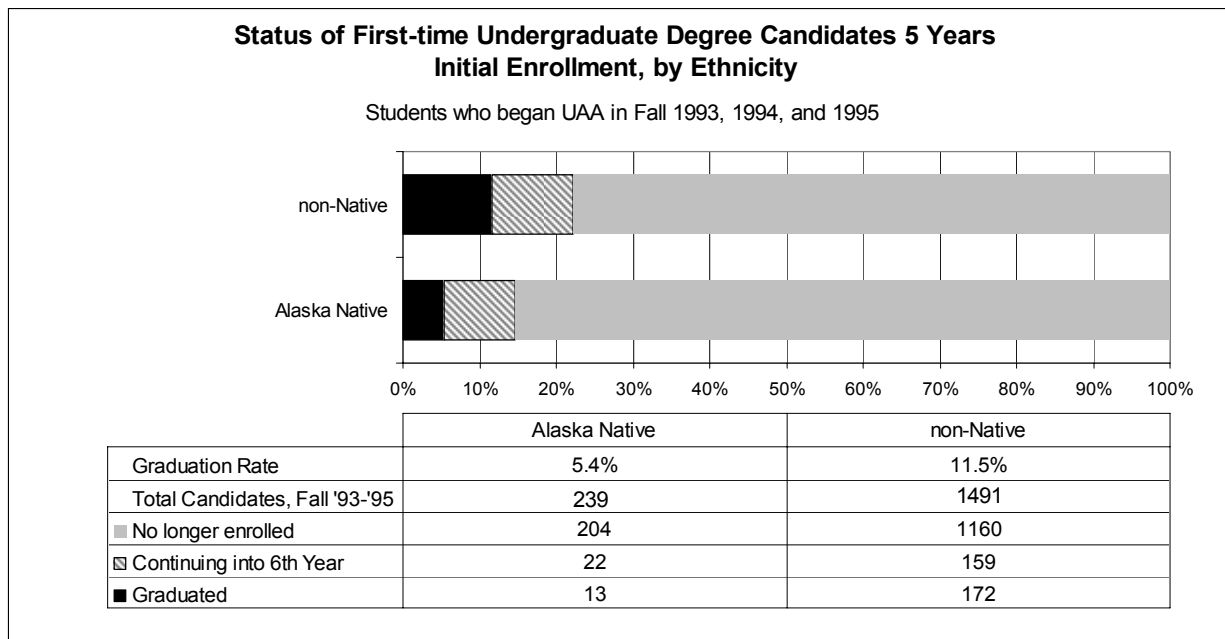
By five years after their initial enrollment, 5.4 percent of the Alaska Natives had received degrees, compared with 11.5 percent of non-Native students. About 9.2 percent of Native students and 10.7 percent of non-Native students continued into a sixth year of study.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Alaska Native and American Indian Students at UAA*, Topic Paper 2003-04, Dr. Patrick Moore, Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment.

<sup>6</sup> *Student Persistence at UAA*, Topic Paper 2001-04, Dr. Gary Rice, Office of Institutional Planning, Research, and Assessment, May 2001.

**Figure 6-26. University of Alaska Anchorage Graduation Rates by Ethnicity**  
(Among First-Time Freshmen, Fall of 1993, 1994, and 1995)



Source: UAA Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment, *Student Persistence at UAA; Topic Paper 2001-04*

### Lack of Native Educators

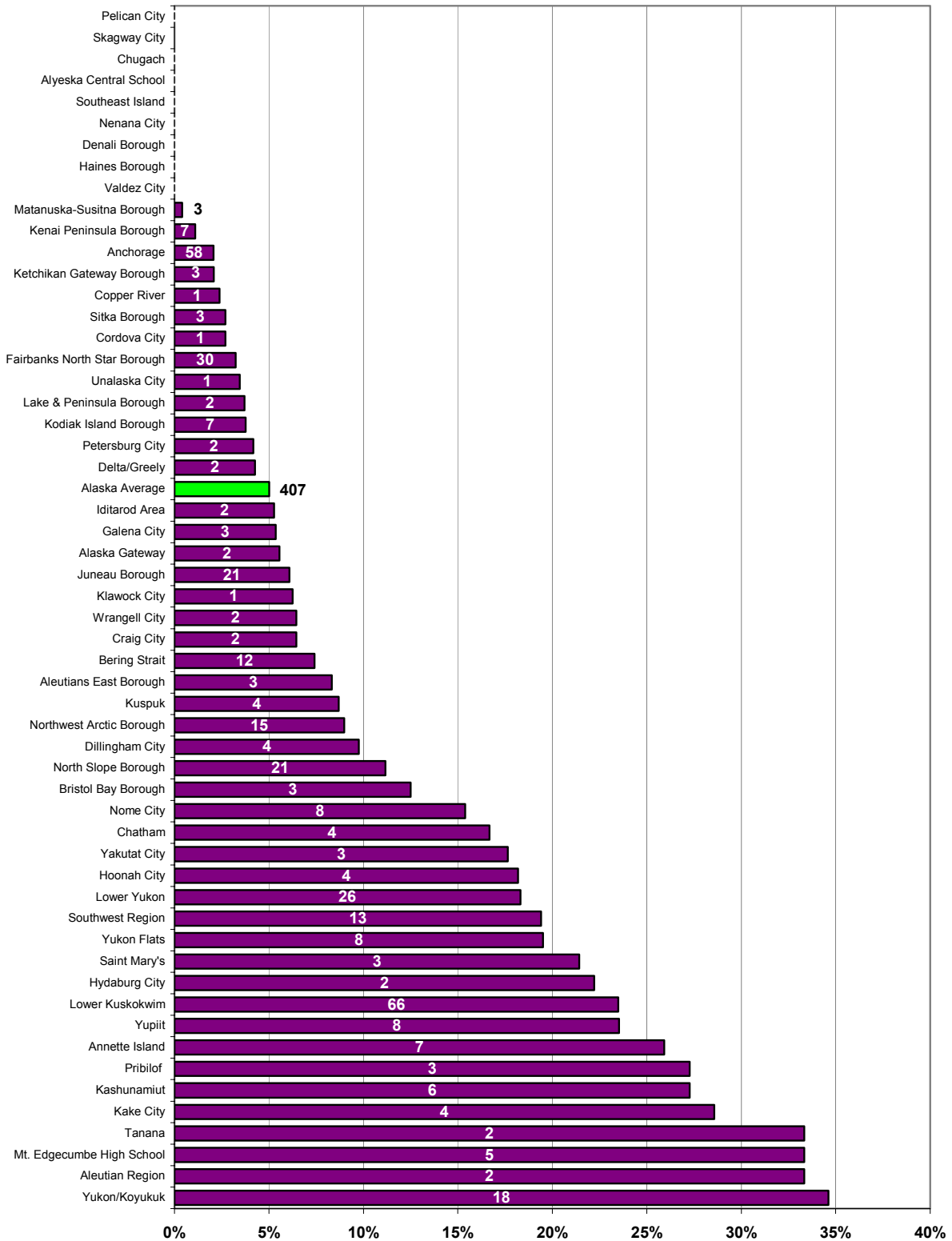
Some analysts believe that Alaska Native teachers might be more effective than other teachers in helping Alaska Native students learn, in part because Native teachers would be more likely to stay in small villages long-term, provide better continuity for students, and share cultural values. But the number of Alaska Native teachers is small. Figure 6-27 shows the number and percentage of Alaska Native teachers in Alaska school districts in 2001.<sup>7</sup> The average across districts was 5 percent, but it varied from virtually none in some districts to as high as 30 percent in a few districts.

The share of Alaska Native faculty members at the University of Alaska is even smaller. UA reports that in the fall of 2003, less than 3 percent of faculty members system-wide were Alaska Native, and more than half of those were instructors rather than professors. The largest share was nearly 4 percent on the Fairbanks campus, and the smallest just over 2 percent on the Anchorage campus.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Retaining Quality Teachers for Alaska*, G. Williamson McDiarmid, Eric Larson, and Alexandra Hill, ISER, December 2002.

<sup>8</sup> *UA in Review 2004*, available online from the University of Alaska's Office of Institutional Research.

**Figure 6-27. Alaska Native Teachers (Number and Percent), by School District, 2001**



### Brain Drain?

Several recent studies have reported a “brain drain” of Alaska youth. About 40 percent of Alaskans who were 15 and 16 in 1994 had left the state by 2002, when they were 23 and 24, according to a recent article in *Alaska Economic Trends*, published by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.<sup>9</sup> A significant share of those who leave attend colleges outside Alaska and then don’t come back. Educated workers from other states then arrive to fill jobs for which there aren’t enough qualified Alaskans.

The state did not report ethnicity data; we can’t tell from their report to what extent Alaska Native young people are migrating out of state. To assess whether Alaska Natives are also leaving the state, we looked at the 2000 Census Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Although the sample is small—5 percent of the population, or about 7,300 Alaska Natives living in Alaska and 1,200 living in other states—it provides detailed census information, protecting people’s confidentiality by providing only limited information on where, below the state level, they live.

As Table 6-3 shows, numbers of Alaska Natives moving into and out of Alaska have increased over time, although they remain quite small, compared with numbers of non-Natives moving in and out. Between 1995 and 2000, 7,070 Natives left the state and 5,598 moved in, for a net loss of close to 1,500.

**Table 6-3. Movement of Native People between Alaska and Other States**

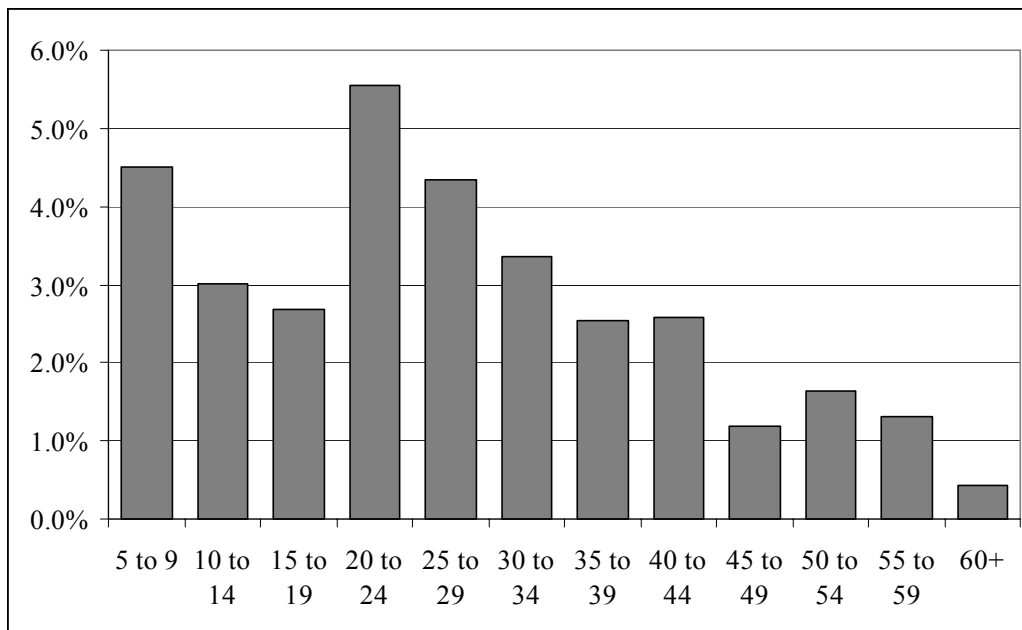
	Out-migration	In-Migration	Net Migration
1965-70	1,281	1,607	326
1975-80	2,233	1,899	-334
1985-90	5,860	4,809	-1,051
1995-2000	7,070	5,598	-1,472

Sources: U.S. census PUMS data and ISER estimates

Figure 6-28 shows the percentage of Alaska Natives who were in the state in 1995 but not in 2000, by age groups. Those most likely to leave the state were young adults 20 to 34, along with their young children, ages 5 to 9.

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Hadland, “The Brain Drain,” *Alaska Economic Trends*, Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, January 2004.

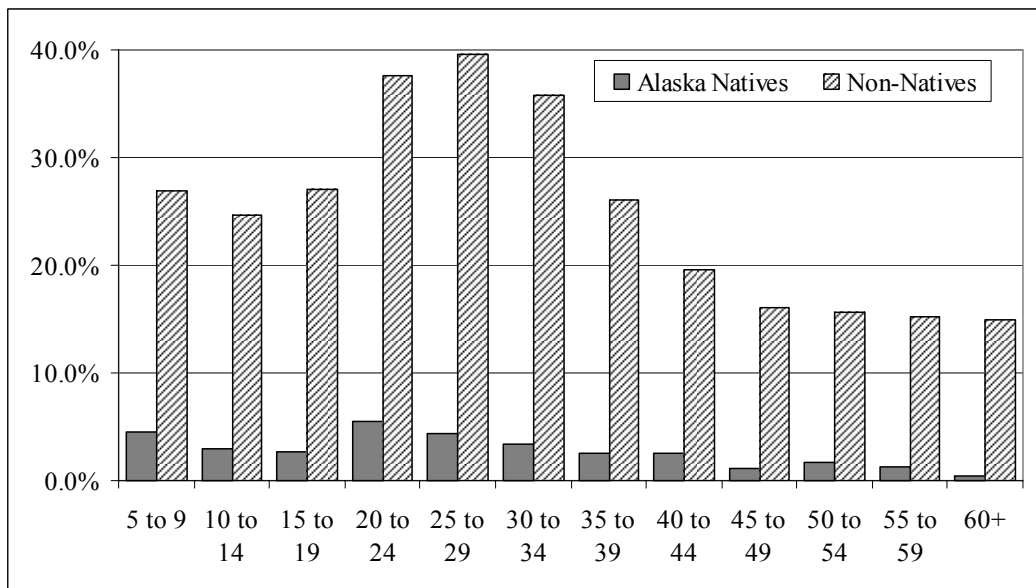
**Figure 6-28. Percentage of Alaska Natives Who Were Alaska Residents in 1995 But Not in 2000, by Age**



Source: U.S. Census 2000, PUMS 5 percent sample

Figure 6-29 adds a second set of bars, to compare out-migration rates of Alaska Natives with that among all Alaskans. In most age groups, non-Native Alaskans were five to ten times more likely than Alaska Natives to leave the state between 1995 and 2000. Among those over 60 in 2000, non-Natives were over 30 times more likely to leave the state.

**Figure 6-29. Percent of Alaskan Residents in 1995 Who were No Longer Residents in 2000, by Age and Ethnicity**

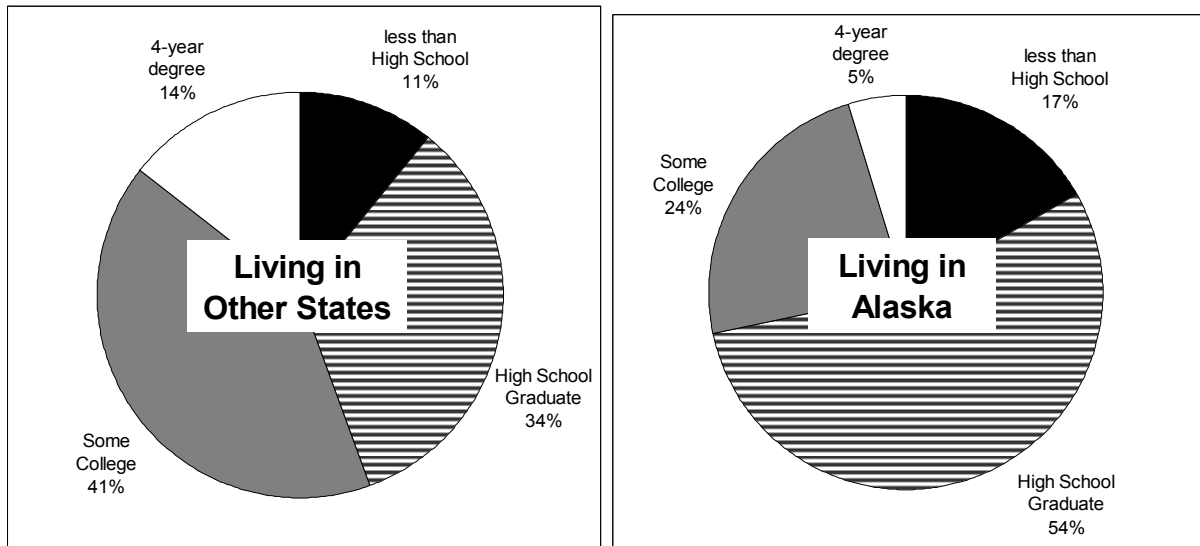


Source: U.S. Census 2000, PUMS 5 percent sample

So the “brain drain” issue is not as large for Alaska Natives as for Alaskans in general. However, it is still an issue, if it is the best-educated Alaska Natives who are leaving to pursue careers elsewhere.

Figure 6-30 compares educational attainment among Alaska Natives (19 to 50), who were born in Alaska but lived in other states in 2000, with those still living in Alaska. Keep in mind that these numbers of those living in other states are small. Only about 10 percent lacked a high-school education. More than 40 percent had at least some college credit, and 14 percent held 4-year degrees. If we compare those numbers with educational attainment for Natives born and still living in Alaska, we see that those now living elsewhere are about three times as likely to have a 4-year degree and 70 percent more likely to have some college. Remember that these figures will differ from those presented earlier for educational attainment of Alaska Natives, which were for all adult Natives. Natives aged 19 to 50 average higher educational attainment than those over 50, no matter where they live, as is true for the U.S. population in general. It’s even more pronounced for Alaska Natives because older Natives’ chances to go to school were so limited.

**Figure 6-30. Educational Attainment in 2000 of Alaska Natives (19 to 50)  
Born in Alaska by State of Residence**



Sources: U.S. census PUMS data and ISER estimates

Note: In this graph, Alaska Natives includes all those who identified themselves as Alaska Native, and those who identified themselves as American Indian and who lived in Alaska either in 1995 or in 2000. All individuals may have identified other races as well.

### What Haven’t We Measured?

To be successful, schools must teach in ways that connect to children’s lives. Schools serving Alaska Natives, especially those in rural areas, have a greater challenge to meet than many schools. Most of the teaching materials and curricula were designed to connect with students whose lives are very different—children who live in cities and suburbs, with paved roads and public buses, whose first and only language is probably English.

Furthermore, curricula in history, government, and literature that are in tune with mainstream America don't even touch on many issues critically important to Alaska Natives, such as ANCSA, ANILCA, tribal sovereignty, subsistence rights, Native languages, and Native authors.

Alaskan educators have tried to meet this challenge in a variety of ways, including language immersion programs in early grades, Alaska studies courses in high schools, culture schools on Saturdays, summer programs, and presentations by Native elders.

Unfortunately, we have no strong statistics to measure how well Alaska Native students are educated in the history, government, art, language, and culture of their people. Some possible measures would be the following:

- The number of students who have read works by Native authors
- The number of students who understand the major provisions of ANCSA and how that law affects their lives and communities
- The number of students who can demonstrate an understanding of current national and state political issues important to Native Alaskans

