PROGRAM EVALUATION,
URBAN/RURAL YOUTH PROGRAM
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREPARED BY
G. WILLIAMSON MCDIARMID
ROSYLAND FRAZIER

PREPARED FOR ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE
3211 PROVIDENCE DRIVE
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99508
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and Methods

The Alaska Humanities Forum contracted with the Institute of Social and Economic to evaluate how well the forum’s Rose Urban Rural Exchange achieved its purpose in 2003, the third year of the program. ISER also evaluated the first two years. The Rose Urban Rural Exchange is intended to build understanding and a state-wide sense of community by bringing urban students to rural Alaska, and rural students to urban Alaska, to learn about each other's cultures. It will continue through 2004.

About 21 urban and 19 rural students participated in the third year of the program. Urban students traveled from Anchorage to the villages of Shishmaref, St. Paul, Kotlik, Akiachak, New Stuyahok, Togiak, Huslia, Russian Mission, Port Heiden, and Wainwright. Rural students from these same villages traveled to Anchorage. In most cases, parents of students who traveled from Anchorage hosted the visiting rural students, and vice-versa. Parents also typically attended orientation sessions.

To do the evaluation, we collected a wide variety of data from: (1) observations of orientation sessions and participants’ post-visit presentations; (2) interviews with participants, parents, and host families (primarily parents of participants); (3) surveys of participants and parents; (4) surveys of how participants’ knowledge about urban and rural Alaska changed; and (5) focus groups with urban parents.

We wanted to learn how the program changed participants’ attitudes, opinions, and perceptions about the areas they visited and about their own home areas; how much they learned about the areas they visited; and how students and their parents rated the content, format, and effectiveness of the orientation sessions.

Changes in the Format of the Rose Urban Rural Exchange in Year 3

In the winter/spring exchange there was a change in which group of students traveled first. This year the urban students went to rural communities first. Afterwards, rural students went to urban areas. Also, Fairbanks was added as an urban site with three Fairbanks students participating in this pilot year.

This is the first year that rural students came to Anchorage in the summer. In the past rural students have come to Anchorage in the spring, while school is still in session, as part of the spring exchange. This year the Babiche Cultural Exchange organized a two-week summer day camp orientation and program, bringing together urban and rural students. The students participated in numerous activities that helped them get to know each other, encouraged team building; and explored many aspects of cultural similarities and differences.
**Changes in Attitudes, Opinions, and Knowledge**

We measured changes on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing the least knowledge, lowest opinion, or lowest frequency and 5 representing the highest on all measures.

**Rural Students and Their Parents**

We collected data from 14 students and 12 parents before the visits. After the visits, we collected data from 5 students and 7 parents. The small number of post-visit responses should be taken into account when reviewing these results.

- Rural students said that for them the three most important reasons to participate in this exchange were to live or make friends in an urban community; to learn about subjects not offered at their home school; and to improve their chances of getting into college or a better college.

- After their visit to urban Alaska, rural students were more likely to say they would continue to learn about urban Alaska by listening to radio programs about urban Alaska, talking with people who live in urban Alaska, and watching television programs or videos about urban Alaska.

- When in urban Alaska, rural students found their free-time activities changed, with the biggest changes being less participation in sports; spending time with elders; and in activities such as fishing, hunting, gathering firewood, and preserving food for storage.

- Rural students said their perceived knowledge of urban Alaska increased after the exchange—as was also true the last two years. Rural students perceived knowledge of urban Alaska rose from 2.37 before the visit to 2.75 after, an increase of .67. Their parents’ knowledge, though, slightly decreased from 2.48 to 2.42, a decrease of .06. (1=none; 5=extensive knowledge) This decline differs from last year.

- Perceived knowledge of rural Alaska decreased among rural students and their parents. Rural students’ perceived knowledge of rural Alaska went from 3.84 to 3.77, an average decrease of .07, compared to the change among parents, from 3.81 to 3.33—a decrease of .48.

- Opinions about urban Alaska among rural students declined somewhat after the exchange visits, decreasing from 3.31 to 3.22, a .09 decrease. Their parents’ opinions about urban Alaska, though, increased from 3.35 to 3.59, a .24 increase. (1=highly negative; 5=highly positive)

- Rural students had the same opinions of rural Alaska before and after the exchange, 3.78 both before and after. But their parents had higher opinions of rural Alaska afterwards, increasing from 3.51 to 3.73, an average increase of .22
While by far the greatest change in attitudes about current issues was a .74 increase in rural parents’ commitment to the statement that Alaskans should not (emphasis added) vote to amend the constitution for a rural preference. This is completely the opposite result of another question where rural parents agreed that Alaskans should be (emphasis added) allowed to vote on whether or not they want to amend the constitution regarding subsistence. Rural parents views on voting for an amendment increased from 4.42 before their childrens’ urban visit to 4.71 after the visits—an increase of .29. (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly disagree). The obvious conflict of these two answers makes us question whether rural parents misinterpreted one of the survey questions and if, perhaps, this part of the survey may have a flaw. On three questions regarding: whether Alaskans should vote to amend the constitution to allow for a rural preference for subsistence: whether parents agreed or disagreed with state recognition of tribal authority of Alaska Natives; and whether funding for rural schools should be increased, rural parent’s agreement with these statements declined by an average of .50 after their children’s urban visits. Rural parents offered many suggestions about how Alaska could accommodate different cultures and people with different values. Detailed responses are included in the body of this report.

When asked who most influenced their overall experience in urban Alaska, rural students cited both other teaching staff in rural and other teaching staff in urban Alaska. Both groups of teachers received 4.0. (1=not at all; 5=very important).

For the second year rural students said that differences in teaching and learning methods in urban and rural schools presented the most problems or difficulties during the exchange. However, none provided an explanation as to why these differences posed such problems.

Also for the second year, looking back over the entire Rose Urban Rural Exchange experience, rural students and their parents felt they had been most affected by having a chance to get to know urban people and to learn more about their way of life. Rural parents and students indicated another strong affect of the program was the perspective it gave them on their own community.
Urban Students and Their Parents
We collected data from 18 students and 17 parents before the visits. We collected data from 18 students and 26 parents after the visits.

- Urban students ranked getting an increased understanding of rural communities as the most important reason for participating in the exchange, followed closely by getting another perspective on urban Alaska. This is just the reverse order of last year’s urban students. The third most important reason they cited was the opportunity to live or make friends in rural Alaska. This is ranked the same as last year.

- Urban students were asked how they learned about rural Alaska and, after the visit, how would they continue to learn about urban Alaska. The greatest change in their pre- and post visit methods were talking with people who live in rural Alaska and with fellow students or teachers about rural Alaska; or reading newspapers or magazines articles from rural Alaska.

- Urban students said the biggest changes in their free-time activities while they were in rural Alaska were less time going to museums, theater, concerts, and movies; performing in music, arts, etc.; and attending sports events.

- Urban students’ knowledge about urban Alaska decreased from 4.26 to 4.14 (down .12), while knowledge among parents was almost unchanged—from 3.94 to 3.95. (1=none; 5=extensive knowledge)

- Knowledge about rural Alaska among urban students increased from 2.09 before the exchange to 3.62—a jump of 1.53. Among urban parents, knowledge increased from 2.51 to 2.93, about .42.

- Urban students’ opinions of urban Alaska remained about the same from 3.76 to 3.75, while urban parents’ opinions slightly worsened, from 3.72 to 3.61 (down .11). (1=highly negative; 5=highly positive)

- Urban students’ opinions about rural Alaska rose from 3.31 to 3.61, but their parents’ opinions decreased from 3.35 to 3.23.

The greatest change in pre- and post-visit opinions about current events was on the question of whether Alaskans should be allowed to vote on amending the constitution to allow a subsistence preference for rural residents. Agreement among urban parents about whether Alaskans should vote on this issue dropped from 4.0 to 3.62 (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). Urban parents offered several comments on how Alaska could accommodate people with different cultures and values. These can be found in the body of the report.

Urban students said that people from rural Alaska—such as host families, host parents, friends they made, and other adults—were important to their exchange experience.
Overall, the problem urban students cited most often was the way the rural experience was organized and differences in teaching/learning methods between urban and rural schools. Although students marked that there were a few problems, no comments were provided of specific instances. (Other problems cited less often are noted in the body of the report.)

When thinking back over the entire Rose Urban Rural Exchange experience, urban parents and students said what affected them most was having a better understanding of why subsistence is such an important issue for Alaska Natives; why some rural communities feel that their schools and education are being neglected; and why Alaska Natives want as much control as possible over what affects them.

Survey of Knowledge

We asked students and their parents a series of questions on their knowledge about a number of things before and after the exchange visits. We used one single test for all four respondent groups—urban and rural students and parents. The questions reflect general Alaska Native perspectives and urban/rural issues about subsistence, education, health and safety, and economics.

All the respondent groups did better on the post-visit test than on the pre-visit test, administered before the orientation session. The test is more a measure of concepts reviewed in the orientation session than of what participants learned from the entire exchange. Our later interviews indicated that participants learned a lot that wasn't captured in the survey of knowledge. Survey results are in the body of this report.

Program Evaluation

Urban Students’ Comments

- About half the students felt sessions brought them together. Those that felt the sessions brought them together tended to say that the orientation prepared them for the exchange. Students who felt the orientation did not bring students together as a group tended to say they did not need as much orientation.

- Most students enjoyed their host families and felt they developed a closeness with them. Host families were described as being generous and hospitable. A couple of the students talked about how busy their host families were. They had a lot going on. Only one student said a strong relationship had not been formed.

- Urban students visited in the winter and summer and had an opportunity to participate in many activities: boating, hunting, catching and drying fish, crafts, playing sports like basketball, school dances, watching television and videos, cooking, riding snow machines, gathering and collecting berries and firewood, and making and eating Eskimo ice cream.
All the urban students made friends during their village stays. Many describe these friends as close and very good. Most talk about making friends with the kids in the rural communities. Others mention strong relationship with their extended host families (i.e. mother, grandmother, sister, etc.)

Host families and the Alaska Humanities Forum staff was very helpful during the village stays, according to the urban students. Students didn’t mention any other specific organizations in the communities that provided support.

The urban students wrote in great detail about what they learned about their host community and rural Alaska, including the importance of subsistence, friendliness of villages, cohesiveness of the village and how fast news travels. Some mentioned how their views of rural Alaska have changed and how much they have learned about rural Alaska as a result of the experience. Some commented that they do not have a “new” opinion of rural Alaska, but that they now have “an opinion,” and can relate to rural Alaska. One student said it this way:

My views of rural Alaska have definitely changed, perhaps not so much in essence as in substance. I haven’t had any major political-social turnaround, but for the first time I have an opinion—a clear one—and the desire and ability to learn more and become involved in all that this entails.

Detailed comments of the students are included in the report.

**Urban Parents’ Comments**

- Urban parents had few comments about the orientation. Some did not attend. Those who did comment generally said the orientation sessions they attended were effective or prepared them fairly well to be host families. They described the sessions as mostly responsive to their concerns.

- Urban parents said they learned a variety of things about the communities their children visited, including the importance of basketball, the economic system of the community, the importance of the subsistence issue, how the school was run, and the size and location of some rural communities.

- More than half the responding parents said they had not formed any new opinions of rural Alaska as a result of their child’s participation in the exchange program. Some felt it reinforced their current view of rural Alaska. Those that had formed opinions mentioned increased awareness about rural issues; awareness that the schools have good communication technology; and an awareness that it is invaluable to preserve the rural way of life and people’s dignity.

- When urban parents were asked to share their thoughts on what they had learned from their children’s village visits, most talked about what their children had
learned. They said the visits had broadened the children’s knowledge and experience of small community life. They learned how everyone knows each other in rural communities. They also learned how other people live and what they value. When specifically asked what they had learned themselves, many urban parents answered that they did not feel changed.

- Most urban parents felt the program did meet their expectations. Detailed responses about what they will remember and value most from their children’s exchange experience are included in the body of this report.

**Rural Students’ Comments**

Only a small number of rural students and parents responded to the program evaluation. Keep this in mind when reading the results.

- Orientation sessions provided an opportunity for rural students to get ready to be in the city and with urban families and to get to know each other. They also learned how to get around the city, give a speech, introduce themselves, and facts about government. Students were also told that working together is important and that what one person thinks or does affects everyone.

- All felt that the sessions were helpful, but one student thought one of the games during a session, and another thought that the session on safety in the city, the least effective.

- Rural students reported that urban host families were great and treated the students as family members. Some felt they had developed strong relationships with host family members. In one instance a rural student mentioned that host family siblings treated her like a sister. The families spent time with rural students.

- The activities for students visiting Anchorage were different with each host family. Activities included watching movies, going to ballet, voice lessons, theatre, taking a trip to Girdwood, playing board games, hiking and walks, going to church, and pottery painting.

- The Alaska Humanities Forum staff were very helpful, supportive, and lots of fun, rural students said. One student said they helped the Humanities Forum by telling the staff what they had learned.

- Rural students reported that host families caught fish and went camping though they live in an urban area. They learned how to navigate around Anchorage, how schools are different, and how some people are rude, but most are very nice, polite, and curious.
• Only two of the rural students said they felt a change because of their visit. The difference one student felt was learning about some cultures. Another student noted that his friend taught him how to play golf and he will value golf.

Rural Parents’ Comments
• Orientation for rural parents was via teleconference and mail and included general rules, how to treat the exchange student, and suggested activities. Rural parents felt the orientation process responded very well to their questions and concerns.

• Rural parents reported they had developed new opinions and views on urban Alaska as a result of their children’s participation in the program. They noted that there are nice people in Anchorage, many activities their children could enjoy during summer break, and even jobs after school years. Two rural families reported that urban families took care of and treated the rural children as well as the children were treated in their own homes.

• Rural parents said their children had learned a variety of things from their visit including: how to survive in an urban setting; how people live and differ in urban and rural areas; and also the similarities in urban and rural lifestyles. One parent noted that they hoped the experience betters their daughter in the “near and far future.”

Focus Groups
ISER conducts pre-and post-visit focus groups with urban parents, to identify gaps or missing information and concerns of urban parents. Concerns raised in the pre-visit focus group are addressed in the orientation session just before urban students go to the villages. The post-visit focus group helps the program administrators find out if parents’ got the information they asked for, to inform the program staff of other things that came up during the student exchange and to get feedback about the urban host families experience. Summaries of discussions in these groups are in the body of the report including recommendations and suggestions.

This year, the winter 2003 session pre-visit Anchorage focus group and the Fairbanks parent interviews resulted in responses similar to those seen in prior years. Parents who had read the written information materials prior to the focus group or interview found it to be quite thorough. Most looked forward to the first parent orientation meeting to answer any questions that remained. Due to this, the Rose Urban Rural Exchange suspended pre-visit urban focus groups for the summer session to save time and money of participants and staff.
Many parents said they would like information posted on the Alaska Humanities Forum website and encouraged the use of email for communication. Parents had questions about the rural host families and transportation to the communities. Both topics had already been planned for in a future parent orientation prior to their child’s departure to rural Alaska.

Host Families
After the exchange visits, ISER interviewed rural and the urban host families by phone, to learn about their experiences, hear how the families felt the program worked, and record ideas about how it could be improved. Detailed narratives from the rural and urban host families are in this report.

Rural Host Family Comments
- Most host families felt the mailed materials arrived and the teleconference and calls occurred very close to the arrival of the students. The reading material and calls explained the program, expectations of the host families, and talked about planning activities for visiting urban students. Most families felt that the orientation prepared them for their participation in the exchange.

- Most families felt the urban students did well at fitting into the families. The urban students were comfortable. Some families commented the students were really good and that this was an easy experience.

- Host families felt that strong was the wrong word to describe the relationship they developed with the visiting students. The relationships were as strong as they could be in two weeks. While the students were there the relationship with the family was good and comfortable. Since the urban students have returned home some rural host parents miss them, some have written letters to keep in touch, others have not talked to the students but their children have.

Urban Host Family Comments
- Urban parents felt the orientation was good and very thorough. It educated them on the perspectives of the program. Many liked hearing the perspectives of other parents and enjoyed hearing from parents who had hosted before. Most felt the orientation prepared them to host a student, with the exception of one family that had a girl student to house though they have three boys. The family would have preferred a male student. The most effective parts of the orientation were the interactive parts such as the mixers and the question and answer sessions.

- Most families thought the experience of hosting rural students was fine. Rural students were personable and cordial. A couple families noted the initial quiet behavior of their rural students and an uncertainty as to whether it was shyness or unhappiness. In both cases the shyness went away. One parent commented that she felt the student had come to Anchorage with no money and wanted to be driven around and waited on. Many built relationships or a closeness with the rural students they hosted though some parents said they did not form close relationships.
Activities the families did included: family dinner/meals, out to dinner and lunch, shopping for clothes and groceries, sightseeing, watching movies and videos, touring the university, going to basketball games, attending school and church, hiking, biking, swimming, bowling, trips to Wasilla, Seward, Willow, Lake Louise, Kenai, and Girdwood, and visiting the zoo, museum and the carnival. Families noted that the rural students seemed to fit comfortably into the urban lifestyle although some were quiet and shy at the beginning and became more relaxed as the visit continued.

Host families learned many things. They reported that when they see Native people they look at them differently now. They learned specific information relative to rural communities and how unique each one of them is. They’ve come to understand how shy and quiet the rural students are and how this is valued; how academically behind the rural student can be; and how rural students have a higher consumption of junk food. One parent thought subsistence as a lifestyle was dying and out and was surprised to hear the rural student talking about wanting to go hunting and making plans to go to a good college to study areas that related to food preservation. One parent gained perspective on how urban families overbook themselves and how urban people have rapid fire conversation while rural/Native people listen and think before they speak. One parent said, “A million tiny things like they have no carpet on their floors. Things like that came out everyday.”

Host families gained new perspectives on subsistence, lack of services like water and sewer, and the smallness of schools and struggles of rural teachers. Some said they did not feel they had gained a new perspective.

**Organization of Report**
The main body of this report provides information in both table and narrative form. Most of the qualitative information consists of verbatim quotes from students and parents.