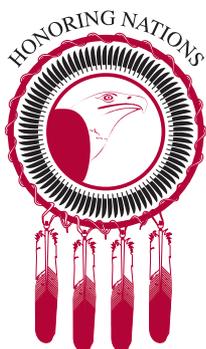


**EXCELLENCE IN
TRIBAL GOVERNANCE**
AN HONORING NATIONS CASE STUDY

**The Ya Ne Dah Ah School:
Melding Traditional Teachings with
Modern Curricula**

Kerry R. Venegas

MARCH 2005



HONORING CONTRIBUTIONS
IN THE
GOVERNANCE OF AMERICAN
INDIAN NATIONS



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Honoring Contributions in the Governance of American Indian Nations (Honoring Nations) is a national awards program that identifies, celebrates, and shares outstanding examples of tribal governance. Administered by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, the program was launched in 1998 with the support of the Ford Foundation, which sponsors similar governmental best practices programs around the globe. Honoring Nations spotlights and awards tribal government programs and initiatives that are especially effective in addressing critical concerns and challenges facing the more than 560 Indian nations and their citizens. Honorees serve as sources of knowledge and inspiration throughout Indian Country and beyond.

The Ya Ne Dah Ah School was awarded High Honors in Honoring Nations 2002.

ABOUT THE HARVARD PROJECT

Founded in 1987, *The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development* (Harvard Project) is housed within the Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Through applied research and service, the Harvard Project aims to understand and foster the conditions under which sustained, self-determined social and economic development is achieved among American Indian nations. The Harvard Project's core activities include research, advisory services, executive education and the administration of a tribal governance awards program. In all of its activities, the Harvard Project collaborates with the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management and Policy at the University of Arizona.

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THE YA NE DAH AH SCHOOL: Melding Traditional Teachings with Modern Curricula

Kerry R. Venegas¹

THE CHALLENGE FACING AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE EDUCATION

For many generations, education in American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) communities has been controlled by sources external to the communities and the people themselves. Large bureaucratic agencies, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) or public school systems overseen by state governments, decided on policies and practices for educating Indian children, mainly without regard for the concerns and priorities of Native communities. The cumulative effect of this disconnect is a long-standing legacy of low academic achievement, high drop out rates, and limited options for AI/AN students in school systems across the United States.² In addition, the imposition of assimilationist educational policies resulted in ever-dwindling numbers of tribal and village members who are fluent in traditional languages and cultural practices.

As tribal nations across the country assert their sovereign right to self-determination, they frequently look first to seizing control of the education of their youth. Such control allows tribal nations to create policies and implement practices

grounded in shared tribal values and traditions, thereby allowing tribes to begin to reverse the devastating effects of cultural and academic erosion associated with non-tribal control. The story of how Chickaloon Village, an Ahtna Athabascan Indian community near Anchorage Alaska, reclaimed control of its children's education, incorporated modern skills with traditional knowledge, and exceeded state and national standards stands as a proactive model of tribal self-determination, Native sovereignty, and community resourcefulness in creating a school of its own.³

HISTORY OF ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATION AND CHICKALOON VILLAGE

From the time of contact with Russian fur traders and their Orthodox Church-run schools in the 18th century to the present, Alaska Native villages like Chickaloon experienced intermittent external interference in the education of their children. Remote geographic locations and extreme climatic conditions kept many Alaska Native villages relatively isolated, with only sporadic missionary schools encroaching on traditional teachings. When the United States assumed control of the territory in 1867, it also assumed oversight of Alaska Native education with concurrent policy efforts to assimilate Alaska Native populations. Acting to remove children from local villages and send them to missionary and, later, government-run schools resulted in the steady erosion of both the languages and the cultural traditions over generations of Alaska Natives.⁴ Many elders recount personal narratives of forced assimilation in these schools – punishment for speaking their own language, the burning of clothing and possessions, and the sense of isolation and anguish that went with it. Suffering under systems devoid of meaningful connections to their real

lives and cultural values, Alaska Native communities handed down a deep mistrust and discomfort with public education systems in which they had no voice and no control.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 further complicated the issue of Alaskan Native education. With the establishment of twelve regional Native corporations under ANCSA, the federal government considered its trustee obligations to Alaskan Natives to be concluded, placing all Alaskan BIA schools under the direct control of the state. Many Native villages saw this as a change for the worse, and demanded recognition of their sovereign rights, including those of self-government and control over education.⁵ One of the most active villages in this movement was the Ahtna Athabascan Indian village community of Chickaloon.

Located sixty miles northeast of Anchorage, Chickaloon Village (hereafter also referred to as “Tribe”) is a federally recognized Ahtna Athabascan Indian village with a tribal membership/citizenship of around 250 and a long history of being proactive in asserting its right to sovereignty.⁶ While the Tribe currently owns and manages 69,000 acres, the its much larger traditional territory is now the most densely populated, urban area of the state. Established as a formally recognized settlement where the Matanuska Branch of the Alaska Railroad ended, Chickaloon Village is also home to a large number of non-Natives – a situation that contributes to pressures for the Tribe to assimilate into mainstream culture. Mirroring the experiences of many Native communities, Chickaloon has coped with over-representation in local prisons and on welfare rolls, continuing low school achievement, low school completion rates, and high levels of alcohol and drug abuse. In addition to these struggles, Chickaloon has also

contended with issues specifically associated with school failure, including a dearth of well-trained teachers, few Native language and cultural curricular materials, and the loss of potential community leaders.⁷ With less than fifty fluent Ahtna Athabascan speakers left in the world and only one fluent speaker of the Chickaloon dialect remaining⁸, the Village also faces the potential loss of its language and its associated traditional cultural practices. What makes Chickaloon unusual is how it decided to address these challenges by forming its own tribally run school.

THE VISION AND FORMATION OF A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Evolving from the vision and the determination of a well respected tribal elder, the Ya Ne Dah Ah School grew out of an effort to address the wellbeing of tribal youth. After volunteering at a local prison, Chickaloon's Clan Grandmother Katherine (Katie) Wade became concerned about the impact of low educational levels, drugs and alcohol on the lives of the young men who had become inmates. Many of the young men she visited in prison knew little about their cultural traditions and felt disconnected from any sense of community or belonging that could give them a larger purpose in improving their lives. Based on her experiences with the young men in prison, Katie Wade started the Ya Ne Dah Ah Saturday school program in the spring of 1982 to provide Chickaloon youth with a sense of community and culture, as well as to ensure the continuation of the Tribe's language and traditions. Based on the Athabascan tradition of elders educating youth through example and storytelling, Katie Wade began sharing the Ya Ne Dah Ah ("Ancient Teaching") stories told by her grandparents and teaching the Tribe's Ahtna language and culture to all Tribal members. Starting small, she and other

elders shared traditional songs and dances with the School's first students. From these sessions the Ya Ne Dah Ah School was born. As concerns increased about the quality of education offered by the public school system, and its continuing disconnect to the Athabascan culture, the Tribal community began to consider ways to make the Saturday school a full time, year-round school.

Building on experiences from time spent in Indian communities in the lower 48 states, tribal members, Village members acted to establish the Ya Ne Dah Ah School as an answer to the lack of cultural relevance and quality educational content they saw in public schools. Acting on the expectations of tribal elders and community members that Chickaloon should take charge of directing the education of their youth, Chickaloon opened Ya Ne Dah Ah School in 1993. With the full support of the community, a donated one-room school house, and a group of dedicated volunteers, Ya Ne Dah Ah became the first and only full-time tribally owned and operated daycare, elementary, and secondary school in Alaska. Annually serving around 20 students between the ages of 1-12, the majority of the community's school-age children, the School connected traditional ways of learning and teaching with cultural values and high quality curriculum in mainstream subject areas like math, science, and social studies. As the staff grew from one part-time volunteer instructor to a full time certified teacher and 14 full time employees, the School developed and incorporated the components that continue to support its ongoing success. These important components include strong community support, the creation of culturally and academically excellent curriculum, and the ability to run the school independent of external control through the development of financial health.

COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL TRIBAL SCHOOL

The Role of Community Support and Parental Involvement

According to Chickaloon Chief and Tribal Chairman Gary Harrison, “Nothing the Tribe does is as important as running its school. Polls of tribe members place education and cultural preservation as the top priority.”⁹

Parents and community members, both Native and non-Native, play a welcome and much-needed role in every facet of the Ya Ne Dah Ah School. The daycare program is integrated with the elementary school, making it possible for the staff who are parents to participate directly in their children’s education. Elders in the community, including Clan Grandmother Katie Wade, are not only welcome in the School’s small classroom, but are also honored teachers, a status consistent with Ahtna Athabascan tradition and a practice reflecting appreciation of the special skills and knowledge that only elders can provide.

Parent participation is 100% at the Ya Ne Dah Ah School, and the existence of a waiting list is indicative of the increasing number of people who are moving back into the area for the opportunity to enroll their children. Although housing within the Village itself is limited, families are willing to travel from the surrounding area to place their children into the School. Even more impressive are the community members who do not have a child of school age yet give their time, money, and labor generously to support the School. The academic and cultural achievement of YNDAS’s students is a source of deep

community pride and is seen as the responsibility of the entire community, even those who are not Tribal members. Chickaloon residents feel that “Our Tribal School and Education Department are not isolated initiatives, but rather integrated as an essential government function performed by the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council. A school, or any Tribal project cannot be successful in a vacuum; it requires community support and a functioning government.”¹⁰ School staff continually focus on forming collaborative partnerships incorporating community feedback into school processes, as well as keeping parents constantly informed about the progress being made by YNDAS students. On-going review of school goals and curriculum by both the Tribal Council and the Tribal School Board ensures a balance of educational and community perspectives.

This level of community support enables YNDAS to offer its students a breadth and depth of learning that is rarely if ever found in mainstream educational systems. This commitment to the School extends to even the Tribe’s highest levels, as demonstrated by suggested plans in 2003 for moving Ya Ne Dah Ah from the donated one-room schoolhouse to the larger building housing the tribal administrative offices, even though the move would have meant that the tribal government would have had to operate in a place without sewer or water amenities. In fact, the School is seen as a source of future tribal leadership and as a center for the maintenance and dissemination of Athabascan traditions and culture: both are seen as essential to the community’s future.

The Creation of Culturally and Academically Excellent Curriculum and Programming

Research indicates that schools reflecting and representing a student's language and culture can have an enormous impact on a student's attitude and academic success¹¹, and Chickaloon was determined to create a school that would enable students to "walk in both worlds" successfully. The community wanted to honor their traditions and create an environment where students would be successful in academics and in life. This meant enabling students to be active participants and leaders in their culture, in their spirituality, in their community, and in the larger world.

To this end, Ya Ne Dah Ah School is built around the following eight objectives: 1) to teach the Ahtna Athabascan language to Chickaloon tribal members and children; 2) to teach children to survive on their own by learning how to cook, clean and take care of themselves and others; 3) to teach children good work ethics; 4) to allow children to grow and become strong in their spirituality; 5) to teach traditional values that children would not get in the public school, such as respect, listening to elders, responsibility, honesty, cooperation instead of competition, care for the environment, working for elders and caring for others; 6) to teach children Chickaloon's traditional culture including dancing, drumming, crafts, and stories to preserve them for future generations; 7) to expose and involve the children in the ongoing developments, issues and current work of the tribe; and 8) to prepare the next generation of tribal leadership with the strong academic skills they will need, as well as strong traditional values.¹²

In order to accomplish these objectives, YNDAS staff and community members have carefully melded modern, standards-based curriculum from the State of Alaska's home school office with language and culturally-based curriculum developed by the Tribe's former Education Administrator, Donita Peter, the school's Cultural Director, Sondra Stuart, elders, and other community members.

Students attending Ya Ne Dah Ah learn Ahtna Athabascan language and cultural practices, traditional values and ethics (e.g., respect for the environment), as well as mainstream academic subjects. Science, social studies, language arts, and math are integrated with traditional interests and contemporary issues and all subject matter incorporates language skills. After opening each day with traditional prayer circle, drum songs and dancing, students learn math by harvesting and measuring the sap of birch trees, map making and botany with Tribal Forestry department staff, health and risk prevention with Tribal Health Department staff, and traditions, values, and history with village elders. On Fridays, students experience a full day of culture, language, and lessons uniquely geared toward contemporary issues in tribal government, environmental protection, and other public concerns. According to Donita Peter, "The teachings from YNDAS are not just academic, but a way of life for our people. From the roots up, we are building a responsible and informed tribal citizenry who embody tribal self-determination and learn to expect and create effective governance."¹³

Determined to answer the need for high-quality, culturally-based curriculum, the Tribe's Curriculum Development Project is developing its own meaningful and applicable educational programming. Using a rich multi-media format to teach Ahtna

Athabascan cultural heritage, the Project has already piloted multi-thematic units about “Songs and Dance,” “Fish Traps and Wheels,” “Potlatches,” and “Yenida’s Stories” with hands-on activities, reading enrichment, internet links, and accompanying video materials. Dedicated to breaking down old stereotypes and increasing sharing across cultures, the Chickaloon curriculum is also being integrated into the local Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, which serves over 5,000 children. In addition to these culturally focused units, Ahtna Athabascan language is integrated into all basic instruction. The School also benefits from close ties to and support from other Ahtna Athabascan villages in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, such as Artic Village and Copper Center. Elders from these villages often visit the school to share stories, songs, and other traditions of the Athabascan people.

In addition to developing curricula, Ya Ne Dah Ah also integrated high quality, research-based instructional programming, such as the National Science Foundation and NASA supported “Globe Program,” into the School’s academic framework. An internationally recognized science instruction program, Globe applies skills-based learning to local issues, with the opportunity for students to collaborate with students and scientists all over the world.¹⁴ Because the School is privately funded and independently run, Ya Ne Dah Ah’s staff is able to seek out and adapt innovative instructional programs to better serve the academic needs and goals of their students.

The results experienced by the Ya Ne Dah Ah students and the Chickaloon community speak for themselves. YNDAS students have consistently scored higher on the statewide

TerraNova CAT/6 assessments than their state and national counterparts and they are learning to speak the Ahtna language fluently. School staff are proud to state that students are enthusiastic to attend school and that dropping out is not a problem. Further, the YNDAS Youth Dance and Drum group is well-regarded and is often invited to open ceremonies, participate in powwows, and perform at schools regionally and statewide. In 2002, the group opened up a three-day environmental health conference in Anchorage by honoring and welcoming tribal leaders from across the United States with an hour long drumming and dancing performance. Although the School is now focused primarily on daycare and elementary school level, YNDAS's first graduate has now become the leader and teacher of the school's dance and drum group, a school Ahtna language instructor, and a successful computer technician for the Tribe's Educational Department. And the School's long-reaching impact is being felt at all levels, with several staff members, including the Tribe's former educational director, choosing to pursue advanced degrees at local universities.

The School is quick to point out that its success can be measured in many different ways.

When our students traveled to Copper Center, which is two hundred miles away, to attend a traditional Potlatch, an elder asked one of our students in our Ahtna Athabascan language "How are you?" and he was astonished to hear the student respond in Ahtna, "I am fine. How are you?"¹⁵

A conversation that would not have been possible the year before now stands as a profound symbol of what is possible today.

Achieving Financial Health

Funding for schools is always a challenge even under the best of circumstances, and even more so for an independently run school like Ya Ne Dah Ah. While Chickaloon Village is a federally recognized tribe and works closely with the federal government on law enforcement and environmental initiatives, the Tribe does not receive any state or federal funding for its school. In fact, after the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971, the state legislature refused to recognize tribal governments as individual and independent entities at all. Currently, Alaska's state legislature receives all the federal funding for Alaska Native education, distributing the money only to state sponsored municipalities and local school districts. Unlike many American Indian nations in the lower forty-eight states, ANCSA prevents Alaskan Native villages like Chickaloon from directly accessing federal funding in efforts to run their own schools.¹⁶ Worse, current state legislation requires Chickaloon to relinquish its right to sovereign immunity as a prerequisite to receiving any state funding.¹⁷

Unwilling to compromise its sovereignty or its vision for its children, Chickaloon Village broke new ground by finding ways to fund the Ya Ne Dah Ah School. Although the School has been forced to close several times over the years for financial reasons, tribal citizens have been persistent in securing funding and unyielding in their determination to keep the school open. In 2002, Ya Ne Dah Ah had an annual operating budget of \$150,000, receiving 98% of its school funding in targeted support from private foundations, with the remaining 2% coming from resourceful fundraising, such as dance performances and local raffles, and dedicated community

effort. Through sustained efforts in seeking out and leveraging sources of support, Chickaloon Village has taken an innovative approach to addressing the financial challenge faced by many independently run schools.

From the very beginning Ya Ne Dah Ah received the bulk of its financial support from private foundation grants, local donations, and fundraising efforts. The School has obtained several small grants from the Peace Development Foundation of Amherst, MA to fund a teaching position and another grant from the Threshold Foundation to support school facilities and curriculum. Wal-Mart and other local businesses have donated gift certificates and small sums of money on a regular basis. In 1997, the School was compensated for participating in a textbook piece called “Meet the Children of Chickaloon” in a Houghton-Mifflin second grade social studies text. Collaborative partnerships with nearby schools, such as Sutton Elementary, have provided students with expanded access to athletic and recreational facilities while creating opportunities for students to share traditional stories and songs with Sutton’s staff and students.

Developing a close relationship with the Cook Inlet Region Incorporated, the local Alaska regional corporation, has also been invaluable to the school. Over the last 30 years, Chickaloon Village and CIRI have repeatedly clashed over issues of Native rights and activism, but the formation and implementation of Ya Ne Dah Ah School has become a source of shared regional pride. CIRI and Chickaloon now work together to advance the School’s mission of “giving community youth the skills necessary to function in a modern world while retaining and facilitating traditional knowledge and practices” as well as serving as a model for other villages and tribes.

The Corporation gave the School a percentage of its 2002 CIRI Golf Classic proceeds and has pledged long term continuing support.

Community effort has also been invaluable to maintaining the School, including assuming responsibility for sharing knowledge and skills, teaching both academic and cultural classes, maintaining school grounds, holding bake sales, and providing transportation for the school students. Students' families pay a nominal tuition of \$50 per child per month, but if a family cannot pay, they can contribute volunteer time in classrooms or help with any of the numerous tasks involved in keeping the School running on a daily basis. As Kari Johns, Ya Ne Dah Ah's current director, explains, "we really appreciate the help, sometimes more than the payment. It takes a lot of work to keep the School running and kids also get to see their parents involved with the School. Kids are happier, more comfortable and if there are any problems, they get solved more easily." In addition, all money raised by the YNDAS Youth Dance and Drum Group is added to the School's budget.

CHICKALOON LOOKING AHEAD: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

After a decade of innovation and self-determination, Chickaloon now faces challenges to evolve with its student body, plan for its continued financial stability, expand its efforts to serve the community, and share experience and knowledge with other Native communities.

YNDAS is growing with its students. Currently serving students from pre-school to eighth grade, the School plans to add ninth grade to the curriculum in 2005. Meeting the challenge of expanding curriculum and teaching practices in order to “loop” with its students as they age, the YNDAS staff is busy designing and implementing new curriculum throughout each school year. Every year brings an increase in the number of students who want to attend, so the School is actively pursuing means to hire additional qualified staff. In the near future YNDAS will also be seeking resources and staff to begin serving the special needs students of the community. In addition, the School is focusing on its outreach efforts, extending service for part-time students, supporting high school student participation in the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, organizing performances by the YNDAS Dance Group, and visiting regional public schools to share curriculum and culture.

Independent funding for YNDAS is crucial to ensuring its sovereign grassroots efforts to serve more of the Village’s children. Because funding for the school is still mainly from private foundations and grants, the Village is examining strategies to raise its own capital and endowment while staying private. To this end, the School is exploring revenue-generating activities such as publishing and distributing curriculum and other tribally generated materials. In fact, Clan Grandmother Katie Wade, who started the School, recently published a book about her life and her experiences, with proceeds going to the School. Chickaloon is also seeking ways to attract major donors and is developing a long-range financial development plan to better assess and manage the resources it already has. Out of these efforts is the hope that increased financial health will permit realization of a new facility for Ya Ne Dah Ah School. Housing the School has been a long term

concern and the efforts to build a new facility continue to be a slow moving process. Last school year, the waiting list increased and children had to be turned away from full time study at the School. Designing and meeting code regulations is complex and it can be expensive to get all of the pieces into place. For the present, YNDAS still operates in its little school house and moves in steps towards a larger home.

Expanding the School's capability to reach a larger number of youth and community members depends largely on capturing the knowledge of its elders to pass along to future generations. Most of the elders are now over 70 and the School has ongoing efforts to visit the elders in their homes in order to record their stories, experiences, and knowledge. In fact, over the summer of 2004, the entire staff worked diligently to capture the knowledge of its elders through the creation of an interactive CD-Rom language program that the School will be piloting this fall. Enhancing Ahtna Athabascan language and culture revitalization in the community for all adults and children has always been the top priority for Ya Ne Dah Ah and the School is open to the community five days a week, for one and half hour each morning during the School's language and culture time. According to School staff, the timing of the open sessions can make it hard for the community to participate and through the interactive CD-Rom program, they hope to expand the number of people who can listen to and practice speaking the language, even outside of the classroom.

A number of villages and Native nations have visited Chickaloon looking for information on how to establish and maintain their own schools. Says Kari Johns, YNDAS school director, "[other Native nations] have the drive to want to see change and improvement. We do emphasize that it is not easy to do this and it takes effort, but it is very important." YNDAS is also

excited to learn from other Native communities. A recent visit by a Maori group from New Zealand offered the opportunity to share knowledge and to benefit from hearing about how the Maori have faced similar challenges over the years. This two-way exchange of information goes beyond the technical details of school operations. Bringing together related languages and cultures increases opportunities to speak revitalized languages, increases access to resources, and expands the influence and awareness of sovereign identity and culture. But as Kari Johns explains, it really all boils down to the belief that “our kids will succeed if their kids succeed – and the kids are our number one priority.”

By far, Ya Ne Dah Ah’s greatest success has been its ability to keep focused on the priorities it has had since its inception – raising language and culture to the forefront, while teaching their children to become good learners and successful people in the Village and beyond. Efforts to keep culture the focus, not just a supplemental activity, has driven the development of ever expansive academic curriculum and the concurrent certification of teachers in the culture by the Tribe. The School continues to recognize their children’s gifts, honor the knowledge of its elders and members, and teach the world about what it values on its own terms.

CONCLUSION

Built on the vision of Clan Grandmother Katie Wade and the aspirations of a community, Ya Ne Dah Ah School has proven that culturally based curriculum can be both spiritually and academically enriching, while providing Native students with the tools to exceed state and national standards. As the School and the Tribe continue planning for the future, the community

of Chickaloon exemplifies Native sovereignty in action as it strives to create a culturally responsive learning program serving Tribal members from birth to adulthood. A tribally run Boys and Girls Club, after-school activities, adult education courses, early learning classes, and the development of a tribal college are all ways the Tribe will seek to improve economic opportunities and end dependence on outside resources.

Reclaiming the right to educational self-determination by establishing and maintaining the Ya Ne Dah Ah School for more than a decade, the experiences of Chickaloon Village can provide a model for other communities seeking to create and support their own educational programs in the face of limited resources, lack of mainstream institutional support, and lack of culturally relevant curriculum. The community believes “commitment to this effort defines us as a tribal nation in that we dared to dream a different path, and we are now breaking a trail for others.”¹⁸ Chickaloon’s commitment to self-determination and the community’s persistence in active efforts to meet the challenges of political, financial, and institutional obstacles to success, offer a number of key lessons.

First, Indian nations and Native villages that are deeply committed to self-determination are persistent in their efforts to overcome political, financial, and institutional obstacles to self-governance. A “can-do” attitude is a prerequisite for tribal success.

Second, welcoming and encouraging the involvement of parents, family members, community leaders, and Tribal Elders as a critical part of children’s education creates schools capable of ensuring student success while providing a depth and breadth

of experience, knowledge, and resources unknown in most public school systems.

Third, seeking out ways to meld traditional teaching and cultural values with innovative mainstream curriculum, Tribes can create their own culturally relevant, real world learning programs that give students the tools to excel academically while learning the self-determination to be responsible and informed Tribal citizens and future leaders.

Fourth, creative and persistent efforts to address a lack of resources can produce the means to independently fund Tribal efforts in education. Leveraging grants from private foundations, support from local businesses, community efforts, and collaborative partnerships with local school districts can be a comprehensive approach to ensure sovereignty.

Ultimately, as Tribal Chief Gary Harrison explained in 2002, the success of Ya Ne Dah Ah stands not only as “a testament to the hard work and determination of Chickaloon Village Tribal citizens who have fought tirelessly to bring into being the vision of our elders” but also “evidence of our love and support for our young people and their abilities to learn the Ancient Teachings and apply them in this complex world.”¹⁹

NOTES

¹ Kerry Venegas has been a secondary science teacher for over a decade, working with at-risk youth in rural communities. Currently working as a research assistant for The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, she holds a Master’s degree from the University of New Mexico in secondary education and an Education Specialist degree in special education transition from the George Washington

University in Washington D.C. As a second year doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Kerry is researching community-directed schools and programs serving American Indian and Alaska Native youth

²See *Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action*, the final Report of the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, U.S. Department of Education, October 1991. Available at http://www.kued.org/productions/2worlds/at_risk/.

³ The Ya Ne Dah Ah School was a 2002 recipient of High Honors from the Honoring Nations national awards program, identifying it as an outstanding example of tribal governance in addressing critical concerns and challenges facing Indian nations and their citizens.

⁴ For more detailed explanation of U.S. American Indian Educational policy and outcomes please see Wright, David E. III, Hirlinger, Michael W., & England, Robert E. (1998). *The politics of second generation discrimination in American Indian education: Incidence, explanation and mitigating strategies*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, Hopkins, Tom (1962). Leadership in Alaskan Native Education. *Journal of American Indian Education* 2 (1). Available at <http://jaie.asu.edu/v2/>, Cornell, Stephen & Kalt, Joseph P. (2002). Native America at the new millennium *Harvard Project on American Indian Development*, Cambridge, MA.

⁵ See Mertz, Douglas K (1991), *A Primer on Alaska Native Sovereignty*. Available at <http://www.alaska.net/~dkmertz/Nativlaw.htm>.

⁶See “Change in Chickaloon,” *Anchorage Daily News*, Sunday D-section, p.1 and 6, August 12, 2001.

⁷*Funding in Indigenous Communities*, The Lannan Foundation, 1999. Available at http://www.lannan.org/ICP/funding_report/00_contents.htm.

⁸ Ethnologue – Languages of the World website. Available at www.ethnologue.com.

⁹ “*Change in Chickaloon*,” Anchorage Daily News, Sunday D-section, p.1 and 6, August 12, 2001.

¹⁰ Chickaloon 2002

Honoring Contributions in the Governance of American Indian Nations Report on Ya Ne Dah Ah School, p.5.

¹¹ From *Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action*, the final Report of the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, U.S. Department of Education, October 1991. Summary of findings available at http://www.kued.org/productions/2worlds/at_risk/#tradition. Full report available at <http://www.tedna.org/pubs/nationsatrisk.pdf>.

¹² From CIRI Alaska Regional Corporation Newsletter August 2002. Available at <http://www.ciri.com/newsletter/aug2002/02ynda.html>.

¹³ From the *Honoring Contributions in the Governance of American Indian Nations* application, Chickaloon, 2002, p. 4.

¹⁴ More about the Globe Program may be found at <http://www.globe.gov>.

¹⁵ As related by Donita Peters, Chickaloon Education Administrator, in the *Honoring Contributions in the Governance of American Indian Nations* application, Chickaloon, 2002, p. 6.

¹⁶ See Mertz, Douglas K (1991). A Primer on Alaska Native Sovereignty. Available at <http://www.alaska.net/~dkmertz/Nativlaw.htm>.

¹⁷ Chickaloon Village Tribal Council letter to *Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development* from Gray Harrison, Athabascan Chief and Tribal Chairperson dated January 2, 2002.

¹⁸ Chickaloon 2002, *Honoring Contributions in the Governance of American Indian Nations* Report on Ya Ne Dah Ah School, p.5.

¹⁹ Chickaloon Village Tribal Council letter to *Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development* from Gray Harrison, Athabascan Chief and Tribal Chairperson dated January 2, 2002.

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