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Steve Cooper

Stephen Lay

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Stephen Lay said this year Alaska will have an estimated 1000 teaching jobs available. Most of them are in the Bush where an estimated 1/3 of teachers quit every year. Most of them that quit do so out of frustration and aggravated by teaching in adverse conditions. Teacher turnover and inadequate preparation of teachers for Bush communities are two closely related problems which adversely affect rural Alaskan education. For the past four summers a program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks has been directly addressing the problem. The cross-cultural orientation program which is known as X-cop starts with a summer school class, orientation to rural Alaskan elementary and secondary education. Steve Cooper directs the program. Cooper said one of the identified needs by the state board is to more adequately prepare rural educators for Alaska. About eighty to ninety percent of teaching certificates issued are transfers in from elsewhere. He said if we accept the assumption that rural Alaska is somewhat different than Indiana or Idaho then it is really important that they prepare educators. They need to be aware of the language issues, subsistence issues and approaches to inter-ethnic style approaches to benefit functioning in a classroom. Lay said assistance from the X-cop program doesn't stop at the end of the summer. Cooper said it is a three-stage program. The first phase is in the summer and the other two phases occur on site in rural Alaska in the fall and spring. The program is designed to prepare people for the kinds of realities they will be find in rural Alaska so they can become more effective educators and more aware of some of the more unique things in rural Alaska such as the importance of being aware of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. They can have that permeate some of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. They learn to become more knowledgeable about communicative styles to be more effective educators in the classroom. The intent is to produce a more effective educator and a more prepared rural Alaskan instructor and to cutdown on the attrition rate that occurs in the rural districts. X-Cop staff members serve as an informal support network. Superintendents feel very keen about the performance of the educators who have gone through the program. Participants indicate a lot of satisfaction with the materials provided in the program. Cooper said the program has been heavily documented with an outside evaluator. Lay said the real measurement of the program's effectiveness is the lower rate of turnover in the X-Cop participants. Some superintendents are directing their new hires to take attend the summer sessions.