

AN EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF MT. EDGECUMBE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES (1986-2006)

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Outline of Talk

- History of boarding schools in Alaska
- Research questions
- Methods and data
- Preliminary findings
- Next steps



History of Boarding Schools in Alaska

Early 1900s	First Alaska Native sent “outside” to Indian vocational boarding schools
1920s	3 vocational boarding schools established in Alaska
Late 1940s	Vocational boarding schools closed; Mt. Edgecumbe opened
Mid 1960s	State-operated regional boarding schools & boarding home program developed
1972-1976	<i>Molly Hootch</i> case to <i>Tobeluk v. Lind</i> consent decree
1983	Mt. Edgecumbe closed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs
1985	Mt. Edgecumbe reopened by the State of Alaska

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 (high school)	1,691	2,259	2,075	40,266	53,872
Completed at least 1 year of college	499	677	6,002	15,624	21,851
% of Native high school graduates with at least 1 year of college	30%	30%	29%	39%	41%
Completed 4 year degree	199	75	1,400	2,234	4,300
% of Native high school graduates with 4 year degree	n/a	3%	7%	6%	8%

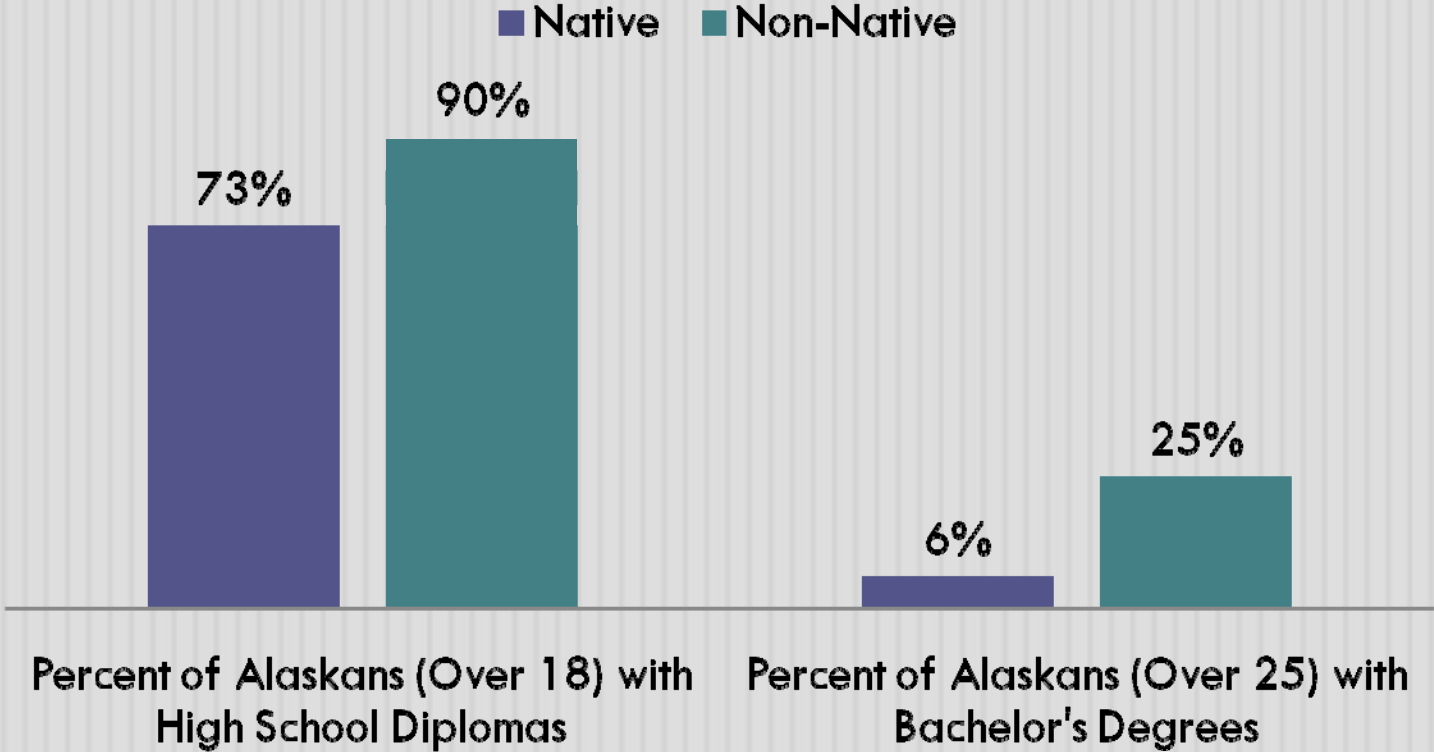
Alaska Native Educational Attainment in Alaska, 2006

Educational Attainment of American Indian and Alaska Native alone (25 and over), 2006 (N=48,640)

Less than high school diploma	23.6%
High school graduate	43.5%
Some college or associate's degree	26.3%
Bachelor's degree	4.8%
Graduate or professional degree	1.8%

Native and Non-Native Adult Alaskan Educational Attainment, 2000

Educational Attainment of Adult Alaskans, 2000



Research Questions

- Why did graduates choose to attend Mt. Edgecumbe High School (MEHS)?
- What were the educational, social, and cultural experiences of students who attended MEHS?
- How well did MEHS prepare the graduates for their futures?
- How has MEHS played a role in the lives of the graduates since they completed high school?

Methods, data and demographics

- Zoomerang Survey
- 127 respondents (out of ~1000)

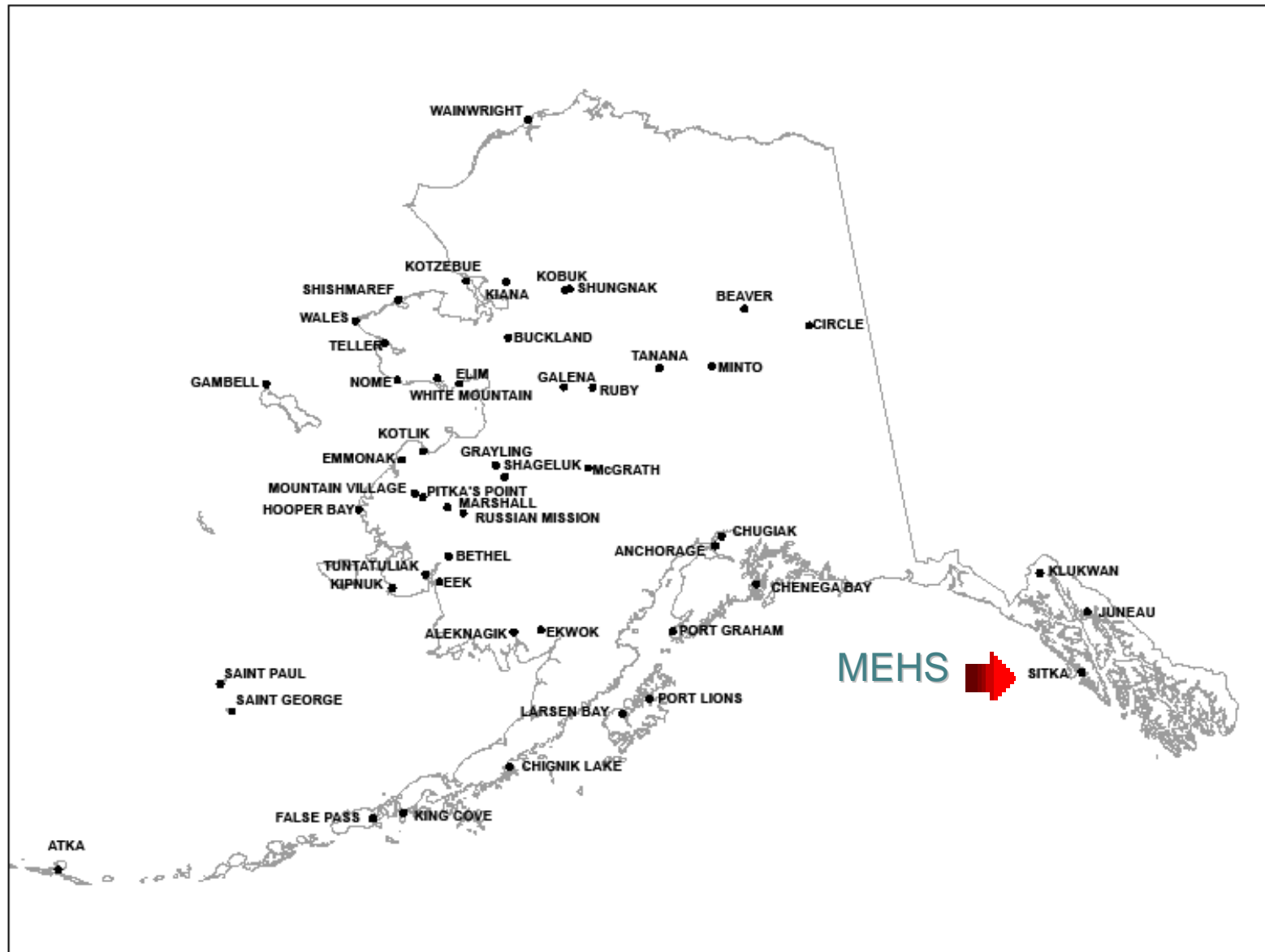
What is your ethnicity?

Alaska Native	88%
Alaska Native (alone)	64.5%
Alaska Native/White	22%
White (alone)	11%
American Indian	1%
Alaska Native/Multi-Ethnic	1.5%

Methods, data and demographics

- ▣ 92 female, 35 male
- ▣ Tribal affiliations: Aleut, Alutiiq, Athabascan, Inupiaq, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Yup'ik
- ▣ 49% are ANCSA shareholders
- ▣ Graduates from all years 1986-2006
- ▣ 108 currently live in Alaska, 15 live outside of Alaska

Respondents home communities (prior to attending MEHS)



Survey Topics

- Why alumni chose to attend Mt. Edgecumbe
- Experience at Mt. Edgecumbe
 - ▣ Educational
 - ▣ Extra-curricular activities
 - ▣ Living conditions
- Post-graduation activities
 - ▣ College, work, military, vocational education
 - ▣ Current status (employment, family etc.)
 - ▣ Leadership roles

Survey Topics

- Attitudes about Mt. Edgecumbe
 - Would they recommend it to others? Their own children?
 - How would they improve the education and living conditions?
- Demographics
 - Tribal and ethnic self-identification
 - Home community pre- and post-MEHS

Why did they choose to attend MEHS?

48% of graduates attended another high school before attending MEHS.

12 mentioned alcohol/drug problems in their school or community

Problems at home or in the community include domestic violence, parents separating, issues with step-parents, racism, poor living conditions

Why did you choose to attend Mt. Edgecumbe High School? Please select all that apply:

Higher quality of education	81%
Family members attended	57%
Extra-curricular activities offered at MEHS that were not offered in home community	34%
Community members attended	15%
Issues in home community	14%
Difficulties in home life	12%
High school not offered in home community	10%
Discrimination in home community	6%
Other	13%

Why did they choose to attend MEHS?

“[at my school] the teachers seemed like they were there just to keep the peace in the classroom. It didn’t seem like learning was part of the equation, it was all about basketball.”

Why did they choose to attend MEHS?

“The village had a population of about 110 at the time. Not enough challenges in school, lack of peers, lack of extra curricular activities in school and outside of school. Also, I wanted to start becoming independent and grow and be exposed to people and activities that would help me be ready for the world once I graduated from MEHS. I saw it as an opportunity to become successful.”

Why did they choose to attend MEHS?

“[an Anchorage] High School was a bad influence on me. I got into drugs and alcohol so I chose to attend MEHS for a new start and also because MEHS had a whole lot more AK natives to be around and around more of my culture.”



What were respondents' perceptions of their experiences at MEHS?



Experiences at MEHS

Please rate your experiences at Mt. Edgecumbe High School in terms of the following. Use a 1-5 scale where (1) means “Very Poor” and (5) is “Excellent”:

	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Development of academic learning skills	0%	0%	2%	22%	76%
Teaching you about your culture	11%	18%	40%	21%	10%
Teaching you about other cultures	0%	3%	17%	33%	47%
Development of career or employment skills	2%	6%	18%	29%	45%
Development of independent living skills	2%	2%	8%	25%	63%

Experiences at MEHS

“The educational experience that I received at MEHS was above average. It had far exceeded the educational and extra curricular experiences that I would have had staying in my home community.”



Experiences at MEHS

“Mt. Edgecumbe has been one of the greatest influences that I've had in my life. I was given the education that I deserve and helped prepare me for college. I had the opportunity to meet amazing people, both staff and peers, who I remain in contact with. Mt. Edgecumbe has a great sense of community; greater than I had ever felt even in my own village, which I love. I was also exposed to a lot during my time at Mt. Edgecumbe. I had the chance to learn more about my own culture, and was simultaneously learning about the other cultures that surrounded me. I am so appreciative of this. I went to Mt. Edgecumbe knowing that I was Native, but I left having a strong identity as an Athabascan woman and it shapes my goals. I also had the resources available to let me know about the opportunities that I have; college, internships, vocational school. Mt. Edgecumbe is all about learning, in more ways than academics.”

Experiences at MEHS

“The academic aspect was good, but I wish I had been more prepared to take advantage of it... I really despise the career counselor, who told me I should become a cab driver or join the military. Its not like he even made the effort to get to know me. Rubbish! Maybe if I had a better set up both in my family life, and the residence halls once I attended, I could have done more with that opportunity. However, my experiences with quality staff in liberal arts fields really shaped my current trajectory...”

Other experiences

- 79% received college credit while attending Mt. Edgecumbe
- While students, respondents were active in numerous extra-curricular activities
 - 50% were members of National Honor Society
 - 47% played basketball
 - 40% were in student government
 - 34% were involved in Alaska Native dance groups

Other experiences

Were you involved in any extra-curricular or recreational activities offered through the school while attending Mt. Edgecumbe High School? Please check all that apply:

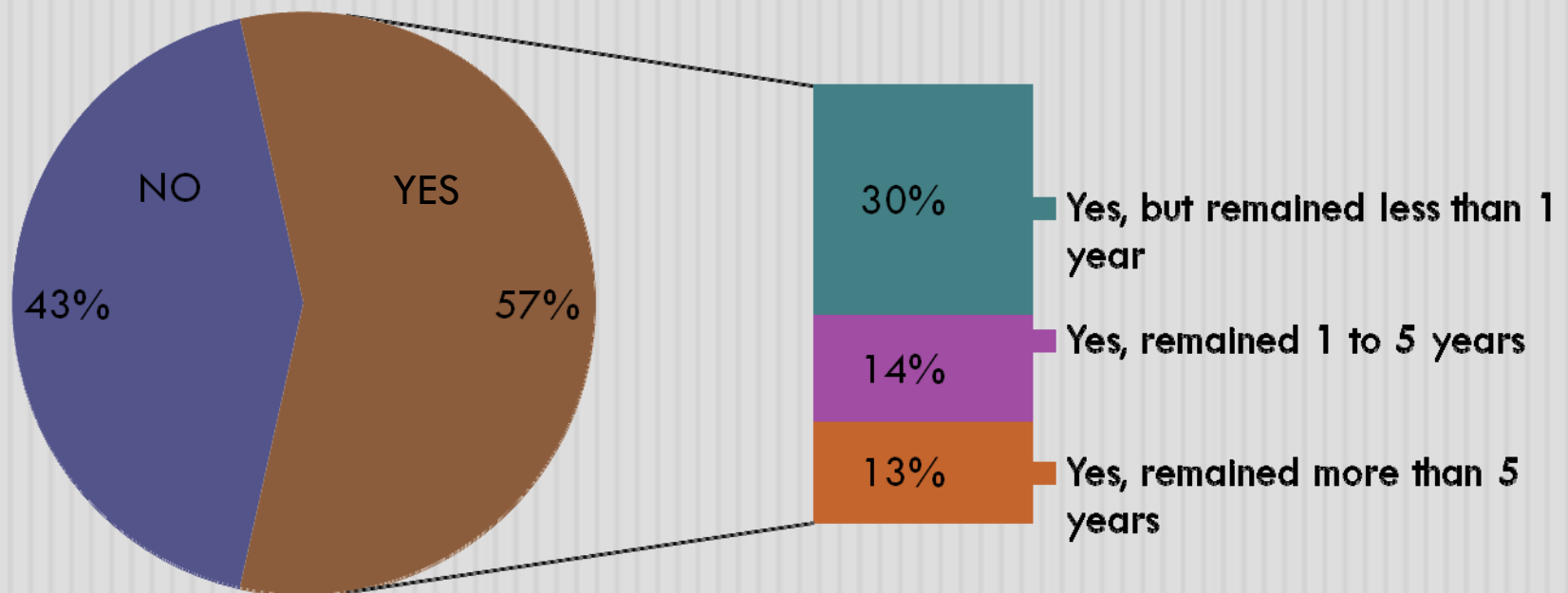
National Honor Society	50%
Basketball	47%
Student Government	40%
Channel Light	40%
Cross Country Running	38%
Alaska Native Dance Groups	34%
World Language	32%
Volleyball	31%
Other, please specify	28%
Cultural Clubs (e.g. Japan, China, Russia)	27%
Yearbook	26%
Future Teachers of Alaska	23%
Wrestling	22%
Washington, D.C. Close Up	20%

What are alumni doing now?

- 88 employed full time, 1 self employed, 7 working part time, 4 homemakers, 8 not working, 18 are currently in school
- Variety of careers – 12 teachers, a lawyer, an anthropologist, a whaling captain, a tribal executive director, tribal program administrators, health care professionals ranging from nurses to community health aides, private business and native corporation positions (accounting, payroll, IT, management, business owners)

After Graduation

Did you return to your home community after graduating from high school?



After Graduation

- Within one year of graduation
 - 78% of respondents began attending college
 - 47% attending college in Alaska
 - 31% attending college outside of Alaska
 - 50% of respondents began working
 - 5% began vocational training
 - 7% had a child

Highest Level of Education Achieved

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

High School Graduate	9%
Some college	38%
Associate's Degree	8%
Bachelor's Degree	25%
Graduate or Professional Degree	12%
Postsecondary vocational training	8%

Alumni and leadership roles

- 46% of respondents have held leadership positions since graduating from MEHS

**Of those who have held leadership positions (n=58), what type?
Please select all that apply:**

Business	18	31%
Tribal	16	27%
Civic	11	22%
Government	8	14%
Other	34	58%

Overall experiences at MEHS

How would you rate the following at Mt. Edgecumbe High School?

	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Your overall educational experience	0%	0%	3%	23%	74%
Your overall residential life experience	3%	7%	17%	30%	43%
Your overall experience	0%	2%	6%	21%	72%

Overall educational experience

- “Considering the options my parents gave me, the curriculum offered in my hometown paled in comparison to that offered at MEHS.”
- “I was a top student in my previous high school prior to attending Mt. Edgecumbe. When I started MEHS, I learned that I can fail without working very hard. This prepared me for college.”
- “The high quality of education helped me prepare for college life. The ability to think for myself and be independent was critical for me to easily transition into college.”

Overall residential experience

- “It helped me build relationships, trust, sharing, respect, responsibility, self-discipline and organization.”
- “It was strict, but instilled good, strong values.”
- “Living in the dorms is an experience, kinda scary but gets fun later.”
- “I loved the freedom (from parents/siblings). Of course there were down sides but now looking back everything was great. I learned to really care for myself and be on my own.

Overall experience

- “Very glad that I had that opportunity. Wonder what might have happened had I not gone—considering what life was like during that time in the village. Don’t feel like there was much for teens to turn to other than alcohol/drugs (at that time). I believe things have improved there since. There is a steering toward culture that is very, very positive. Gives the younger generation a sense of pride in who they are.”
- “I have made relationships at MEHS that will always have an influence on who I am today.”

Overall experience

- “I am very fortunate and thankful for an excellent educational experience at Mt. Edgecumbe. The school prepared me for college life and more importantly being successful in all aspects of my personal life. I was taught the foundation of a good work ethic and it was instilled throughout my three years of high school. There was much challenge from the teachers which I am very grateful for... I excelled academically and socially while I attended the school.”

Overall experience

- “I love that I went to school at Mt. Edgecumbe. I have friends from all over the state now. No matter where I go I’ll run into someone. MEHS built life skills that I forever will know and experience. Examples: living on my own, responsibility, and self-confidence. I’m proud that I am a Mt. Edgecumbe alumni!

Would alumni recommend MEHS?

Would you recommend Mt. Edgecumbe High School to youth in your home community?

Yes	96%
No	4%

Would you recommend Mt. Edgecumbe High School to your own children?

Yes	79%
No	21%

Would you recommend MEHS to youth in your home community?

YES...

“It would depend on the student. Some people would benefit from staying at home, especially if they have a real traditional Native family and lifestyle I would have them stay at home and learn the old ways as best as they can. The kind of knowledge you can get from elders like grandparents is irreplaceable. However, if there's trouble at home and no way to escape to a kind relative, I would say, get the heck out of there, don't even look back. Live life in the moment and have as much fun, raise as much hell as possible at Mount Edgecumbe.”

Would you recommend MEHS to youth in your home community?

YES...

“More opportunities are available than are offered in some of the rural communities. Also, this gives students an opportunity to meet other students and be away from drugs and alcohol. Sometimes in the village, there is no escape from these pressures, BUT at MEHS there is.”

Would you recommend MEHS to your own children?

NO

“As far as whether I'd recommend Edgecumbe for my own child, no. Since I have old parents, and they would probably die when a hypothetical kid who I have yet to create would be in high school, I don't think I would want them to experience that kind of loss so far away... Also there are changes that a kid experiences and its a tough time to be away from family love and support. I wouldn't want my kid to come out as angst-riddled as I have.”

Would you recommend MEHS to your own children?

NO

- “Because I just simply want them home with me.”
- “I wouldn't want them away from me. Too far.”
- “If I lived in the village I would recommend this school to my own children. The village would be detrimental to our children and therefore I would recommend MEHS. But, since we live in a larger community of Fairbanks there is a variety of education for them along with a structured family life that their father and I will provide.”

Would you recommend MEHS to your own children?

YES

- More opportunities are available than offered in some of the rural communities. Also, this gives students an opportunity to meet other students and be away from drugs and alcohol. Sometimes in the village, there is no escape from these pressures, BUT in MEHS there is.
- I would love to send my own children. The education that I received can not be matched.
- They will attend MEHS, if accepted. As Alaska Natives in a town where cultural involvement is chastised at the middle and high school level, I feel they will find it beneficial to attend MEHS rather than [name] HS.
- [MEHS is] good preparation for college life.

Next Steps

- Continue recruiting more survey participants
- In depth interviews with a subset of alumni across the 20 year period
 - ▣ More on why they chose MEHS and their perceptions of the options they had
 - ▣ More on the impact of MEHS on their lives
- Weave in findings from interviews with key informants
 - ▣ Administrators, board members, current and former teachers, state policymakers

Thank You!

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<http://iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Home/ResearchAreas/mtedge.htm>