



Photo by James DeCrane

Hundreds gathered for a Feb. 4 meeting in Anchorage to voice concerns regarding the education of Native Alaskan students.

Group voices concern for Native students

AFACT meeting addresses education

**By James DeCrane
Anchor Writer**

Hundreds of people packed Central Lutheran Church in Anchorage, during an impassioned discussion, Feb. 4, regarding the status of Alaska Native education in the Anchorage School District.

The event, sponsored by Anchorage Faith and Action — Congregations Together (AFACT) was a follow up meeting to an action the group held back in 2005, when the School District pledged to run a pilot program at an elementary and middle school to help improve Alaska Native education and test scores.

The latest meeting presented the finding from an independent study of the pilot programs.

The results?

Native test scores and graduation rates are up slightly but still need improvement.

Parent after parent testified that much still needs to be done to address the problems associated with educating Alaska Native children. The testimony, sometimes terse, sometimes tearful, pointed out that many Native families feel that they are isolated and not listened to at the school.

"I volunteered, tried to help, talked to the teachers," said Nancy Pickett. "I was given the wait-and-see, pat-me-on-the-head approach and sent on my way."

Pickett's testimony echoed the feelings of others who testified that their concerns were not being heard.

Superintendent Carol Comeau promised at the end of the meeting that she and her staff remain committed to addressing Alaska Native issues.

She committed to direct resources to expand the Native Pilot Program and also pledged to help the district better engage Alaska Native families. She promised to meet again with the AFACT community in two months.