



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

**Media Contact:** Henderson -- 343-9431

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The results of a cultural exchange of high school students as far apart as Alaska and Arizona, have turned out to be a happy success.

At the suggestion of a group of Navajo Indian high school students, selected student volunteer from Mt. Edgecumbe, Alaska, High School exchanged classes at the beginning of the school year with their opposite numbers from two Bureau of Indian Affairs high schools in Arizona. The three schools are boarding schools to serve children from isolated homes in Alaska and in Navajo land.

The idea, first advanced by the students and Allen D. Yazzie, Chairman of the Navajo Education Committee, at a Navajo Youth conference held at Many Farms, Ariz., last year, was enthusiastically supported by both groups: the Eskimos, Aleuts and Tlingits of Alaska, and the Navajos of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The Conference is an annual affair sponsored by the Education Committee of the Navajo Tribal Council, made up of Navajo high school and college students attending Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, as well as public and private schools and colleges.

The four students who regularly would attend Mt. Edgecumbe are Margaret Prokopiof, from St. Paul Island, and Effie Vent, from Huslia, both seniors, and Harry Mandregan, St. George Island, and James Shanigan, Pilot Point, both juniors.

The exchange group from the two Arizona schools consists of Marie Holliday, senior from Blanding, Utah, Patrick Platero, sophomore, Holbrook, Ariz., and Melvin Bigthumb, sophomore, Ft. Defiance, Ariz. Marie and Melvin regularly attend Fort Wingate High School, Window Rock, Ariz.; Patrick attends Holbrook High School in Holbrook, Ariz.

The Arizona boys both say that they like the idea of the Mt. Edgecumbe exchange, reporting that academic standards are similar to those of their regular southwestern schools.

Marie is enthusiastic in her praise of Alaska, a state she has always wanted to see.

According to Yazzie, Navajo youngsters understand the necessity of working within the framework of the BIA schools in order to concentrate on correction of language deficiencies, and similar programs not usually offered in other schools.

"But at the same time," he points out, "it is equally important that they be exposed to the attitudes and interests of other tribes."

After the volunteers have been away from their home territory for one year, they will return to their regular schools and graduate with their class.

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<https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/opa/online-press-release/alaska-native-and-navajo-students-enjoy-high-school-culture-swap>