

The Arctic Educational Miracle



They were from a 41-student high school in an Eskimo village on a blizzard-swept island off the coast of Siberia.

They spoke English as a second language and had little world knowledge. They had low reading and writing scores.

They had no computers and almost no books. Previous teachers had written them off as “unteachable.”

The school was threatened with closure for its violence: teachers had been beaten, shot at, and their housing set afire — with the teachers inside.

For complex reasons, the district (which was on the Alaska mainland) entered them in what at the time was considered *the* most difficult academic competition for young people.

Seventy-eight percent of the students at the national finals were from schools or programs for the gifted. To make matters more difficult, the Eskimo students had to compete on subjects, such as genetic engineering and nuclear waste, they had never heard of before!

They studied while hauling water (the houses had no running water), while scraping seal and walrus skins, and once while in the Eskimo skinboats, hunting whales.

They overcame enormous academic deficits, personal tragedy, fire, and educators who, believing that studying hard was not good for Native students, tried to stop them.



Using the methods developed by their coach, Dr. George Guthridge (“Dr. G.”), they stunned American education.

They won *two* national championships in academics.

And then placed first and second in a world fiction-writing competition.



Dr. G. later co-developed a college prep for Alaska Natives. Over 2000 of its graduates have graduated from college, including from such places as Harvard, Harvard Graduate School of Business, Harvard Law, Harvard Medical School, Yale Law School, Dartmouth, Notre Dame, Berkeley, Berkeley Law, the U. of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy, New Mexico State U. School of Pharmacy, the U. of Washington Medical School, the U. of British Columbia Doctoral Program (art history), Annapolis, the Air Force Academy, and West Point, to name just a few places. Selected as guest speakers, several of the students told incoming or graduating college students that Dr. G.’s class had changed their lives.