Qaneryaramta Pinirillerkaa: Strengthening our Language FIF

A seed project to address Yup'ik Language Teacher Development in Southwestern Alaska Report

Through this Tier II Seed proposal, faculty from UAF's Kuskokwim and Troth Yeddha' campuses (Drs. Samson, Moses, Siekmann, Ryan), UAA (Dr. John-Shield) and representatives from the Lower Kuskokwim (Erin Haveland), Lower Yukon (Janet Johnson), and Yupiit (Janice George) school districts sought $10,000 to support the development of a U.S. Department of Education grant proposal to address the language and teaching needs of Yup'ik Language Teachers (both certified and associate) in Southwest Alaska.

We met on the following days:

Dates	Topics Covered	Activities
10/16/24 Zoom	Establishing group, Yugtun instruction needs	Introductions and discussion of problems and needs of schools that teach in Yugtun
10/23/24 Zoom	FIF application	Which to apply for and how funding will be used
2/27/25 Zoom	Getting Information from teachers	Discussion on how to collect data and what will go in the survey
4/9/25 Zoom	Creation of survey; set time to meet in Bethel	Created Google Form; when to meet and travel logistics
8/16-17/25 Bethel	Analyzed survey results; Addressing needs	Discussion on data; needs and what is already available; next steps
10/24/25 Zoom	Establishing consortium	Discussion on why consortium is needed; who to invite

Goals and Objectives met:

The following are the goals and objectives we planned to meet and what was actually accomplished:

Goal 1: Identify the needs of existing Yup'ik Language Teachers within collaborating school districts. Objective: To develop and implement a formal needs assessment of Yup'ik Language Teacher; once collected the data will be analyzed by the faculty and shared with the Collaborative

On April 9, 2025 we created a survey through Google Forms to collect some information from the teachers (both certified and classified). The survey was distributed statewide on August 11th when teachers returned to work (see attachment of survey and results). We analyzed the data when we met in Bethel on August 16th. Pertinent questions and responses to the purpose of our meeting included:

- level of Yugtun literacy (reading and writing) and oral (listening and speaking) proficiency, ranging from 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest: 21 teachers rated themselves at 5 for listening and speaking while 17 rated themselves as high in literacy skills.
- when asked if they were familiar with the language proficiency scales most said they were not.
- Challenges: lack of materials and/or resources and teaching Yugtun to nonspeakers
- Needed resources: materials for different dialects; reading books; hands-on activities; visuals; flash cards; worksheets; and first language speakers

- Teaching practices and methods needed: orthography lessons; language teaching; staying in the language; and teaching comprehension skills
- Assessment: most don't use a language proficiency scale; some use a spelling test; some create their own assessments

Goal 2: Review existing courses and programs to match needs with existing resources and identify 'what is missing' from the curriculum. Objectives: Faculty from each collaborating UA program (UAF Linguistics, UAF- KuC Yup'ik Language and Culture, UAA Education) will review existing programs in order to identify existing strengths and academic resources (Objective A). Faculty will pair data from the needs assessment (Goal 1) with existing academic programming (Objective A) in order to determine 'what is missing' from the existing curricula (Objective B).

The following list indicates what already exists compared to what is needed, and what is missing from our discussions during our meeting:

- For students: KuC Occupational Endorsement in conjunction with dual credit courses for high school students who are able to graduate with a Seal of Biliteracy, indicating the student is proficient in Yugtun.
- For associate teachers: UAF at KuC offers Yup'ik Language Proficiency Certification for language learners wanting to become proficient speakers of Yugtun, which provides a pathway to Yup'ik Language Proficiency A.A.S., and Yup'ik Language and Culture B.A.; UAS has Apprenticeship program, and Indigenous Language Certificate; UAA offers Apprenticeship program in Early Childhood and Apprenticeship program in Administration; LING courses for second language teachers
    - Once students receive their degree in Yup'ik Language and Culture B.A., they can receive their emergency teaching certification through the UAS Apprenticeship program (MAT)
    - Financial support: SHI supports Indigenous people pursuing education degrees; AVCP Tribal Workforce offers scholarships for associate teachers
- Available Support: SHI for financial support; Yup'ik Language Consortium; Yup'ik Language Conference; Yup'ik Language Planning; Resharing of Yup'ik resources through social media; CECI Education materials; PE Grant materials at UAF; YPQC Assessment (for LKSD)
- Missing/Needed/Issues: Not enough instructors to teach YUP courses; low number enrollment; language conferences that are focused on Yugtun instruction; how to involve the community

Goal 3: Develop a US Department of Education proposal to address identified needs. Objectives: To identify one or more U.S. Department of Education grant opportunities that may be used to meet the identified needs of Yup'ik Language Teachers; write a proposal; establish an appropriate delivery model and support Yup'ik Language Teachers to complete the offered programming.

At the time of our meeting US Department of Education Grants were not available so we changed our discussion to the next steps that may address those needs. The next steps include:

- Record a read-aloud of the books from the P.E. grant: Has not been started yet
- Make a website to list resources for teachers: We started the website during our meeting in Bethel, however that website needs to be completed and published.
- Establish a language consortium: Yup'ik collaborators met several times and discussed the purpose of the consortium, and who to invite.

- Investigate programs for associate teachers, what YUP courses associates can take in place of ED or English courses: I had several meetings and email correspondences with School of Ed. We established four YUP courses that teachers can take in place of ED courses. YUP F208 Yup'ik Composition, YUP F250 Yup'ik Literature for Children, YUP F251 Teaching Beginning Yup'ik Reading, and YUP F240 Introduction to Reading and Writing Yup'ik that associate teachers are able to take will be offered Fall 2026 and Spring 2027.

The project furthered the mission and goals of the University in the following ways:

- *Student success and degree attainment: Students are at the heart of UAF's mission. We had the students fill out a survey on their needs and struggles.*
    - The larger federally funded project was to be drafted to recruit and support degree-seeking students, however such funding was frozen. Instead, we discussed what we can do until grants are available
- *Skilled workforce: UAF's mission includes educating students for active citizenship and preparing them for lifelong learning and careers. We play a key role in preparing Alaska's workforce.*
    - The project directly supports the professional development of teachers in rural Alaska; area of high importance and demand to support the academic success of children in rural Alaska
- *Community and Belonging: UAF is committed to fostering a diverse, respectful and caring community.*
    - The project supported Yup'ik language and culture and brought together collaborators from diverse backgrounds and communities to support more equity in the education of Alaska Native educators and students

The project brought together faculty from UAF and UAA, and key members of three school districts (LKSD, Yupiit, and LYSD) that provide Yugtun instruction at their sites. This project will be a great resource when applying for grants in revitalizing and maintaining Yugtun.

Attachment: Teacher Survey

You are receiving this survey email. We appreciate your response. This survey will take about (minutes) to complete.

* Indicates required question

1. Email *
2. Name
3. School District/Work Organization *
4. Position Title *
5. How long have you taught in Yugtun? *
6. Grade(s) you work with *
7. What language(s) did you speak growing up? *
8. Type of Yugtun instruction is used in your school? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Immersion
- ◯ Dual Immersion
- ◯ Yup'ik classes
- ◯ Offered as a course
- ◯ none
- ◯ other (please describe in next section)

9. If other, please describe here

Language and Literacy

10. What is your level of listening proficiency in Yugtun? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
non	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	advanced

11. What is your level of speaking proficiency in Yugtun? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
non	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	native speaker

12. What is your level of reading proficiency in Yugtun? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
non	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	advanced

13. What is your level of writing proficiency in Yugtun? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
non	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	advanced

14. If you have an advanced level of literacy, do you get opportunities to practice Yugtun in or outside of your workplace? (i.e., reading lengthy texts, taking notes Yugtun) *

Dropdown

Mark only one oval.

- yes
- no

Materials, Resources, Curriculum, and Support in Yugtun Instruction

15. What are the challenges in teaching Yugtun? *

16. Do you have access to resources or Yugtun curriculum? If yes, what are they? *

17. What resources are need for teaching Yugtun? *

18. To what extent does your school value Yugtun instruction? * *Mark only one oval.* Dropdown

- The school does NOT value Yugtun instruction.
- The school SOMEWHAT values Yugtun instruction.
- The school FULLY values Yugtun instruction.

19. In what ways does your school support Yugtun instruction? *

20. In what ways does your community support Yugtun instruction? *

21. What suggestions do you have for increasing support from the school or the community? *

22. What suggestions do you have for increasing support from the parents? *

23. What suggestions do you have for supporting parents who are not proficient in Yugtun?

Benefits and Best Practices

24. How familiar are you with the process of second language acquisition? Dropdown

Mark only one oval.

- I am NOT familiar with the process of second language acquisition.
- I am SOMEWHAT familiar with the process of second language acquisition.
- I am familiar with the process of second language acquisition.

25. Which teaching practices and strategies work best for you in helping students become proficient in Yugtun? *

26. What teaching practices or methods do you want to learn about? *

27. How familiar are you with language proficiency scales (e.g., ACTFL)? * Dropdown

Mark only one oval.

- I am NOT familiar with language proficiency scales.
- I am SOMEWHAT familiar with language proficiency scales.
- I am familiar with language proficiency scales.

28. If you are familiar with language proficiency scales, in what ways do you use it in your own teaching?

29. Tell us about the Yugtun assessments that you use. Think about the assessments * that you use in your own classroom, as well as the assessments that are used in your district.

30. What are the benefits of learning Yugtun? *

Education

The following questions pertain to your professional development in teaching Yugtun.

31. What course work have you completed to support you in teaching Yugtun? *

32. What is your highest level of education? *
Mark only one oval.

- High School diploma
- Some college classes
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD

33. Are you currently working towards a degree?
Mark only one oval.

-
- Ye
- s
- No

34. What barriers do you face when taking courses or training in Yugtun instruction? *

35. Do you have a Yugtun language mentor or someone who you work with in your school? *
Mark only one oval.

- yes
- no

36. If you said yes to the previous question, who is it?

37. Do you collaborate with other Yugtun teachers in other school districts? *
Mark only one oval.

- yes
- no

38. If so, how often do you collaborate with other Yugtun teachers?

39. Would you be interested in talking to somebody who teaches Yugtun or to be involved in a Yup'ik discussion group? *
Mark only one oval

- yes
- no

40. Is there anything else you would like to tell us on anything we didn't ask? *

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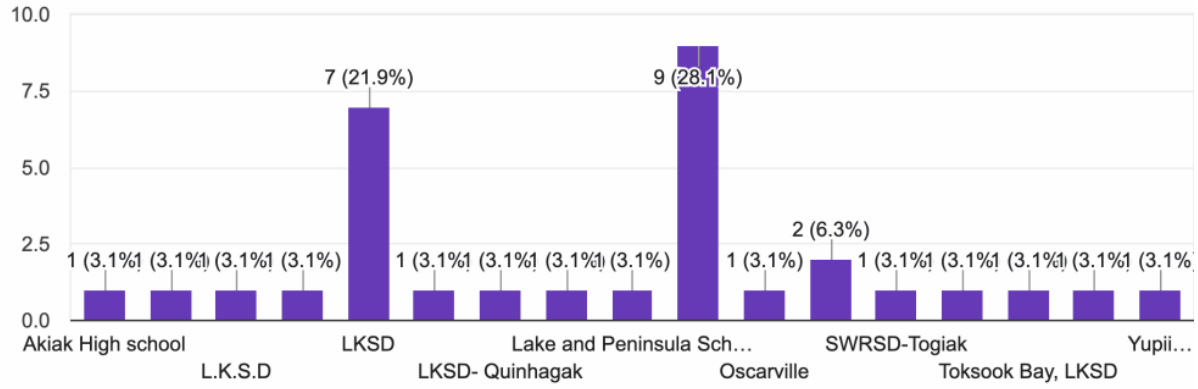
Google Forms

Attachment: Yugtun Teacher Survey Response Charts (from Google Forms)

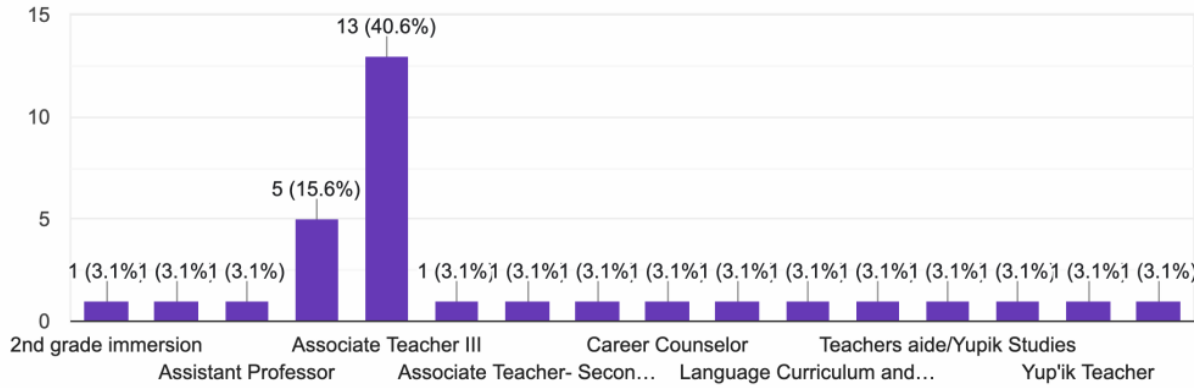
School District/Work Organization

32 responses



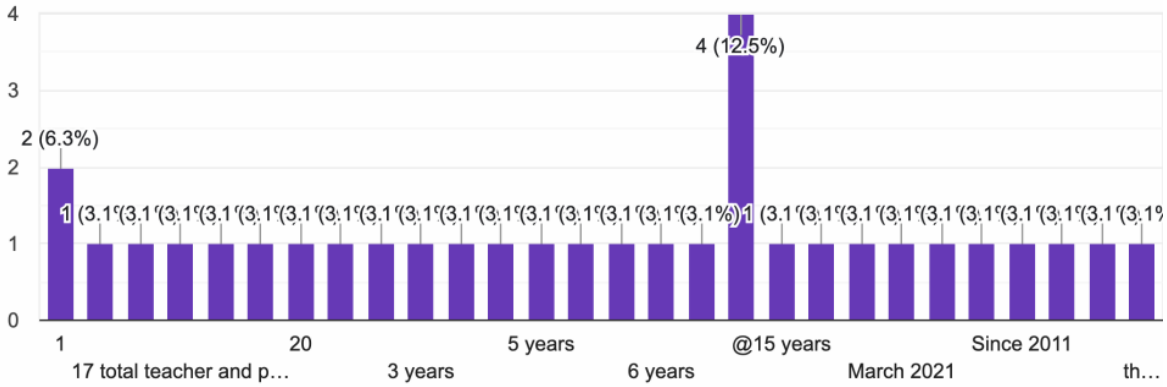
Position Title

32 responses



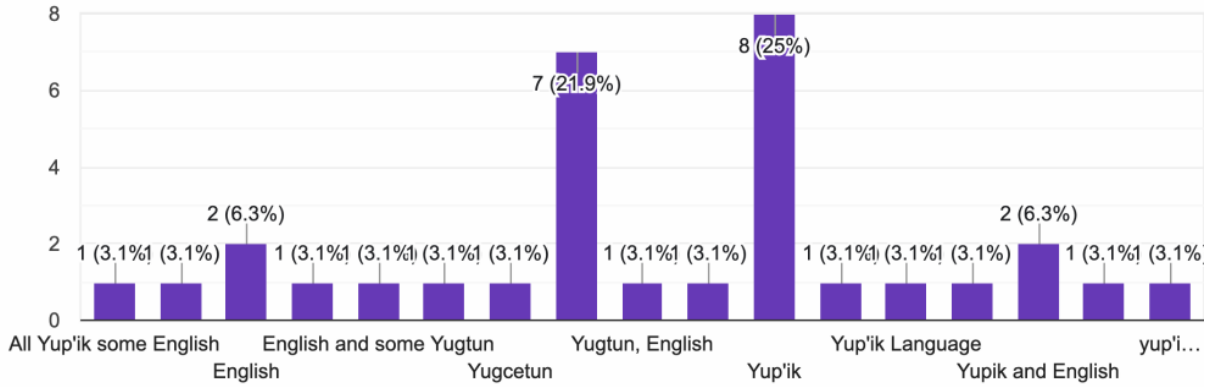
How long have you taught in Yugtun?

32 responses



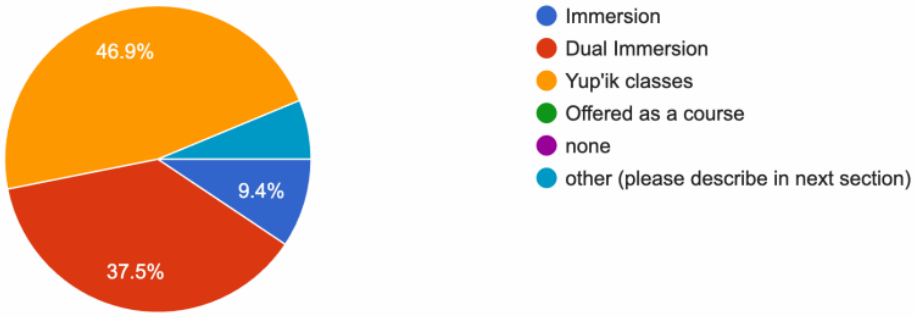
What language(s) did you speak growing up?

32 responses



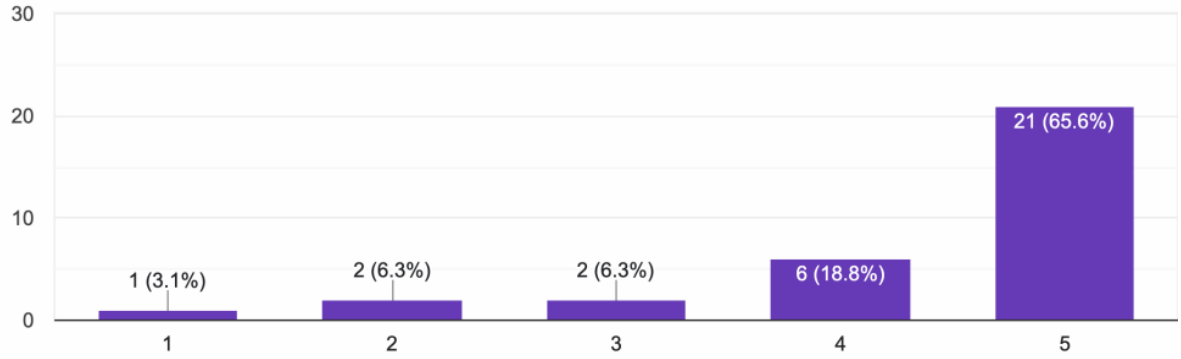
Type of Yugtun instruction is used in your school?

32 responses



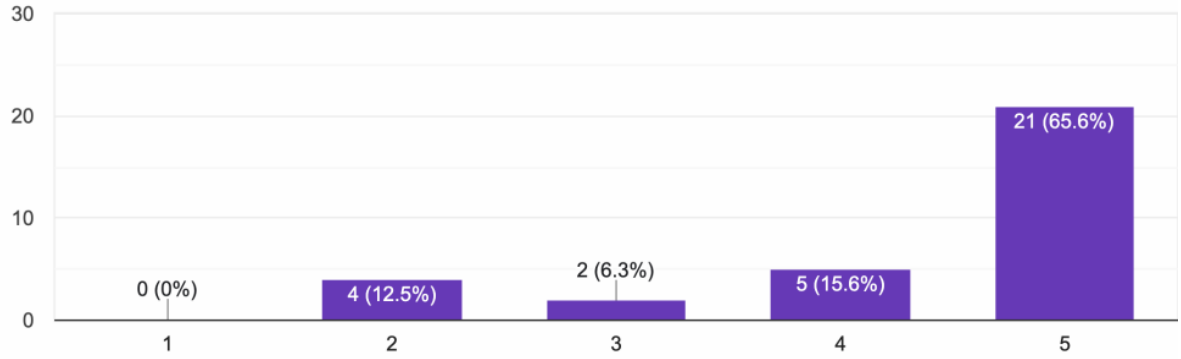
What is your level of listening proficiency in Yugtun?

32 responses



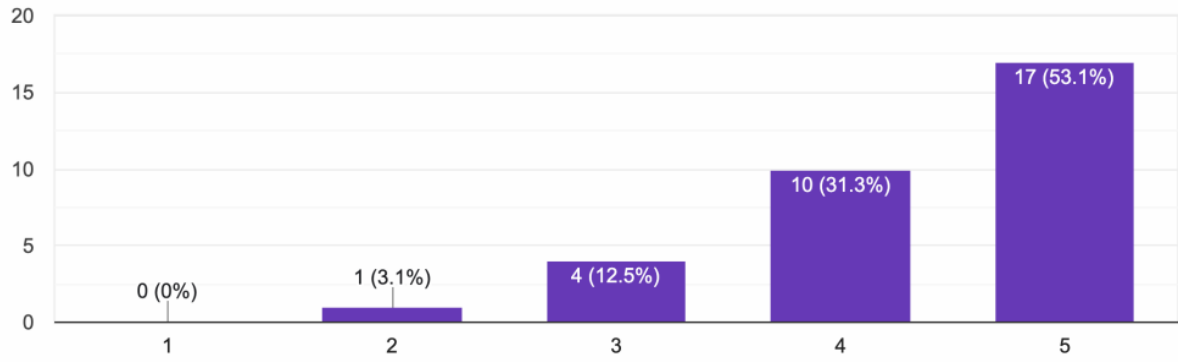
What is your level of speaking proficiency in Yugtun?

32 responses



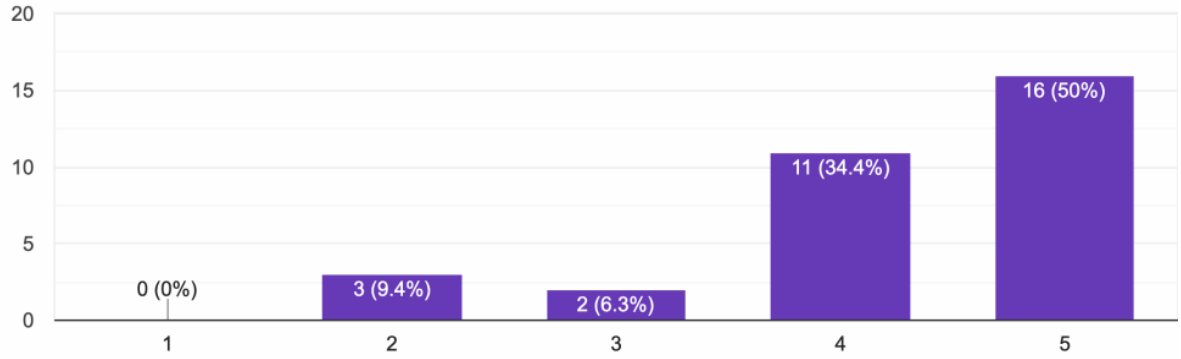
What is your level of reading proficiency in Yugtun?

32 responses



What is your level of writing proficiency in Yugtun?

32 responses



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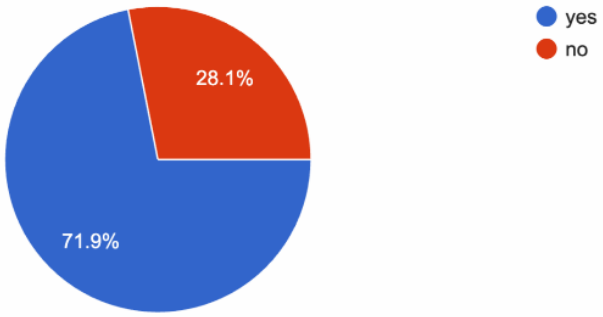
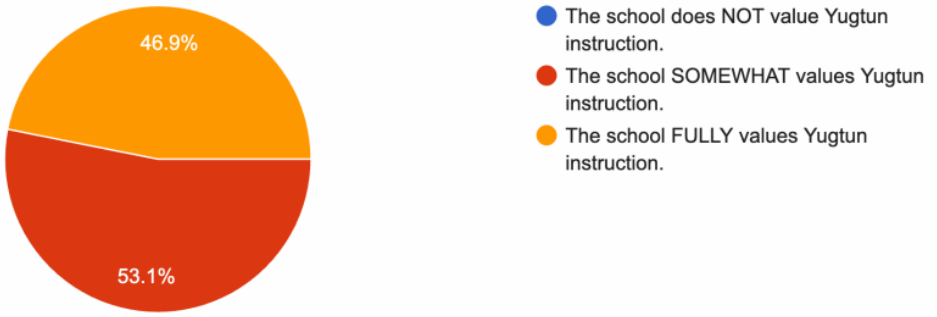
32 responses



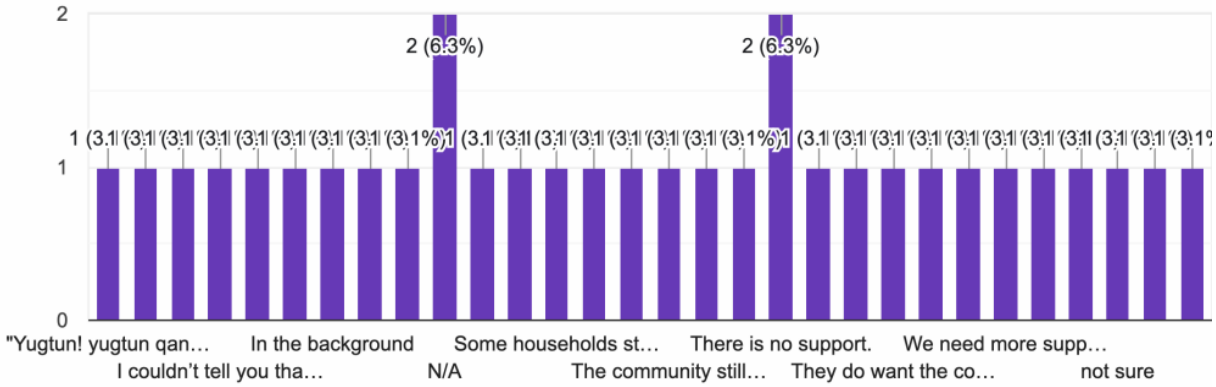
To what extent does your school value Yugtun instruction?

32 responses



In what ways does your community support Yugtun instruction?

32 responses

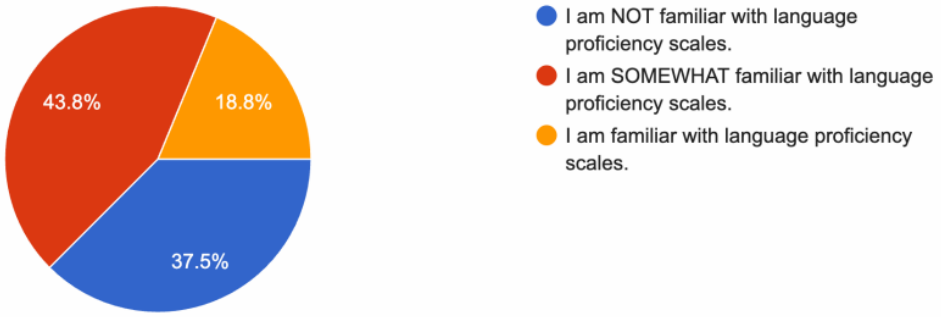


How familiar are you with the process of second language acquisition?

32 responses

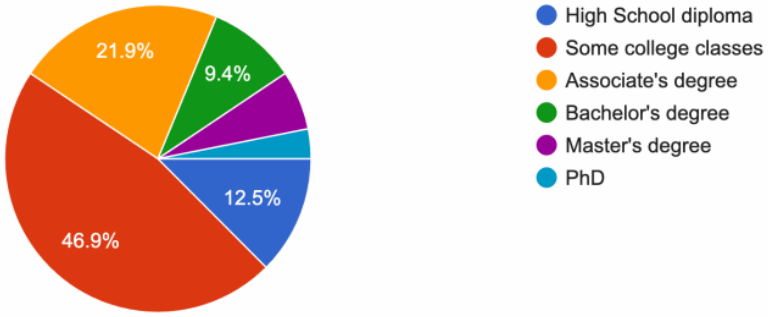
How familiar are you with language proficiency scales (e.g., ACTFL)?

32 responses



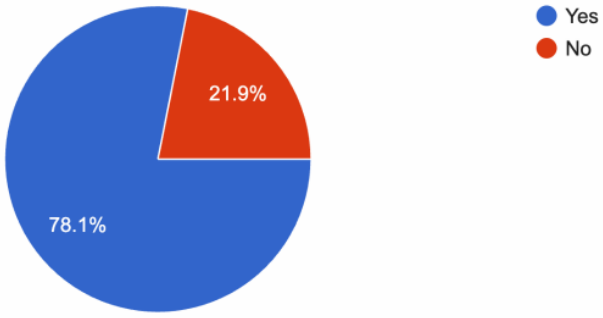
What is your highest level of education?

32 responses



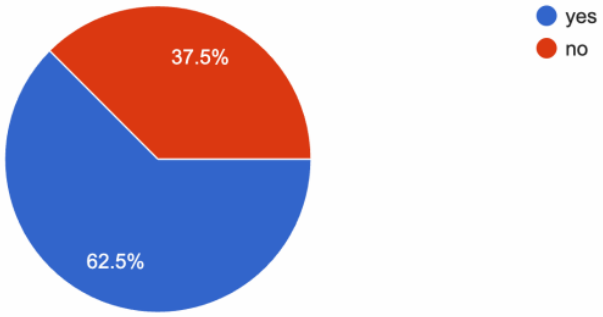
Are you currently working towards a degree?

32 responses



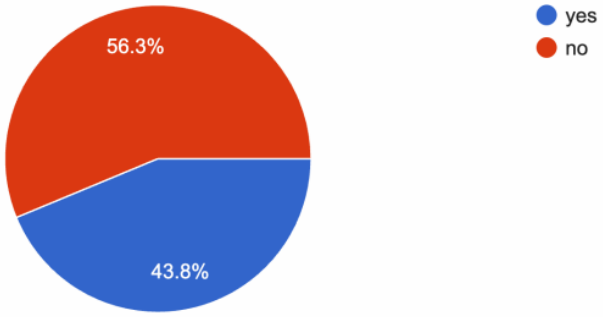
Do you have a Yugtun language mentor or someone who you work with in your school?

32 responses



Do you collaborate with other Yugtun teachers in other school districts?

32 responses



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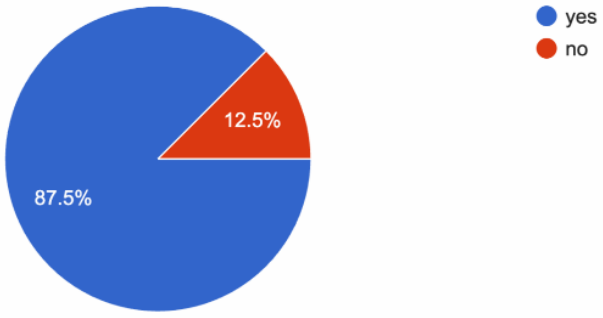
32 responses