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Avant-Garde Learning Foundation Launches Alaska Native Teacher Preparation Program With \$705,000 Commitment From Shell Exploration & Production Company

Anchorage, AK – Alaska's [Avant-Garde Learning Foundation](#) today announced a \$705,000 commitment from the Shell Exploration & Production Company to help launch the Foundation's performance-based teacher preparation and retention program for Alaska Native educators in Alaskan communities. Shell's first installment of the total contribution to Avant-Garde was \$352,000.

"Rural Alaska is facing serious challenges when it comes to education," said Shirley Holloway, president and CEO of Avant-Garde. "Teacher turn-over is high, the number of Alaska Native teachers is low, and recruiting talented educators for our classrooms is increasingly difficult. Our goal at Avant-Garde is to turn these trends around, and with Shell's generous commitment, we're well on our way."

The Avant-Garde Performance-Based Teacher Preparation program is a collaborative effort that includes five Alaska school districts (North Slope Borough, Northwest Arctic Borough, Aleutians East Borough, Lake and Peninsula Borough, and Bristol Bay Borough) and six higher education institutions (Ilisagavik College in Barrow, University of Alaska Fairbanks: College of Rural and Community Development, Chukchi Campus in Kotzebue, University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau, University of Alaska Fairbanks Bristol Bay Campus in Dillingham and Alaska Pacific University).

The mission of the program is to grow, nurture and sustain Alaska Native educators to serve Alaskan communities. Currently, Avant-Garde's higher education partners have 97 Alaska Native candidates in their programs. Funding from Shell Exploration & Production enables Avant-Garde to identify ways to best support these candidates in hopes of greater program retention and successful preparedness for our Native teachers.

"Two years ago, when Shell returned to Alaska after an absence of some years, we made a commitment to ourselves and to the broader Alaska community that we were here for the long haul," said Peter Slaiby, general manager for Shell Exploration & Production, Alaska. "With that long term commitment in mind, we looked at the communities of the North Slope, Northwest Arctic and other regions of the State with an eye toward identifying social investments that Shell could make that would pay dividends to Alaskans into the future, not just in the immediate present."

"Education was clearly an area where such an investment could be, and needed to be, made," Slaiby continued. "As such, Shell is pleased to provide a grant to launch Avant-Garde's teacher preparation and retention program and support the first cohort of Native Alaskan and rural residents who are entering the pathway to teacher certification. We are very proud of the work that has been done to get this program up and running, and we look forward to seeing all the benefits it is sure to deliver for Alaska education."

Founded by Dr. Shirley Holloway in 2005, The Avant-Garde Learning Foundation is committed to serving Alaska communities, families and students to prepare young people for a bright and successful future.

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