Katherine J. LaPlaunt  
Pearl Creek Elementary School  
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Katherine LaPlaunt has been the principal of Pearl Creek Elementary School for the past eight years. As only the fourth principal in three decades, she understands the importance of maintaining the school’s excellent reputation while striving for even higher student achievement. LaPlaunt has also prioritized expanding the student experience by integrating Alaska Native culture and traditions into the classroom. To provide teachers with cultural knowledge and confidence, she initiated cultural sensitivity training through the Alaskan Native Education Coordinator, including small group interactions with Native leaders to break down cultural barriers. Teachers now incorporate Alaskan Native culture into a wide variety of lessons. For example, traditional contests from the Native Youth Olympics are included as part of physical education, and first graders danced with Native elders at the annual Native Fiddlers Festival.

Assistant Superintendent Sandra Kowalski describes LaPlaunt as an extraordinary administrator who approaches her position as a “servant leader” with a focus on transparency and collaboration. As president of the Fairbanks Principal’s Association and Adjunct Professor of Education teaching aspiring administrators at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, she has positively influenced the work of other principals in her area. LaPlaunt has a B.S. in Psychology from Southern Oregon University, a M.A. in Teaching from the University of Alaska Southeast, Juneau, and an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.