



# Challenger LEARNING CENTER of ALASKA



## Connecting Russian Old Believer Students and Kenai Middle School for Space Science Explorations



The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) spans an area as large as Massachusetts, and has 10,000 students in 45 different schools that range in size from a comprehensive high school of 750 students to a rural single teacher school with less than 10 students. Some of the most unique schools are those in Russian Old Believer communities such as Nikolaevsk, Kachemak Selo and Voznesenka. These communities were founded in the mid-1960's as groups of Russian Old Believers, who had initially fled Russia to China in the 1700's under persecution from Peter the Great, came from South America in search of areas to homestead. Their children are raised in the traditional ways of rural Russia - speaking only Russian and following the traditions of Russian Orthodoxy. KPBSD operates schools in each community, providing a unique blend of multi-cultural education mixing modern education with their traditional values.

As the Russian language teacher in Soldotna, Allan Miller organized a year long exchange sponsored by Conoco Phillips and the Challenger Learning Center - bringing together middle school students from Kenai and Voznesenka to explore Russian language and the science of the International Space Station. The project culminated in a bilingual simulated space mission and a day of neutral buoyancy scuba training simulating the work of NASA at the Johnson Space Center.