Research indicates that high school seniors in 4-H are nearly two times more likely than other seniors to plan on going to college.

Members participate in a 4-H international exchange program — either staying with host families in other countries or hosting youth from Japan. This past year, 21 youth from Japan stayed with families all over the state.

Activities are coordinated by 4-H agents and staff in Fairbanks, Palmer, Juneau, Soldotna, Anchorage, Bethel, Juneau, Kodiak, Sitka and Dillingham. Every military installation in Alaska hosts a 4-H program.

4-H OFFERS A LOT OF VARIETY THESE DAYS. In addition to traditional programs, such as raising animals, cooking and sewing, participants may break-dance, luge, serve as legislative pages and study martial arts, science or photography.

A seventh-grade class at Effie Kokrine Charter School in Fairbanks is a 4-H mushing club. Teacher Cassie Jackson works geography, English, math and history into the curriculum and students meet with mushers. Nenana musher Jessie Holmes is working with the class this year and other mushers will stop by.

Students learn about dog care and how to harness the dogs and also about mushing equipment and technique. The class culminates with a couple of spring sessions during which students mush a four-dog team.

Jackson worked with 4-H agent Kendra Calhoun to set up the program. She says tying school subjects to hands-on opportunities that the kids are interested in motivates even reluctant learners. It also gets them outside for exercise.

Freshman Jessy Brockmeyer joined the club as a seventh-grader and liked it so well he has returned as a junior handler the past two years. He will show students how to approach and work with dogs.

He had never mushed before joining the club. “I got to learn something new — and I liked it,” Jessy said.

Some 15,000 Alaska youth participate in 4-H every year, through after-school and special interest activities, camps and summer exchanges. See more information at www.alaska4h.org.