

**Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children**

**August 17, 2021**

**Alaska Regional Hearing**

**Virtual Utqiagvik Site Visit: North Slope Borough School District**

**Recording:**

<https://commissiononnativechildren.org/media/video/virtual-site-visit-north-slope-borough-school-district-superintendent/>

**Commissioners Present In-person:**

Gloria O’Neill, Chair; Dr. Tami DeCoteau, Vice-Chair; Melody Staebner; Carlyle Begay; and Donald Gray.

**Commissioners Present Virtually:**

Dr. Dolores (Dee) Subia BigFoot, Anita Fineday, Elizabeth Morris, Dr. Leander R. McDonald, and Jesse Delmar.

**Commissioners Absent:**

Stephanie Bryan

**Detailees, Staff, and Contractors:**

Ronald Lessard, Department of Education

Eileen Garry, Department of Justice

Regina Gilbert, Department of the Interior

Tiffany Taylor, Department of the Interior

Lisa Rieger, Cook Inlet Tribal Council

Joshua Franks, Cook Inlet Tribal Council

Miriam Jorgensen, Native Nations Institute, University of Arizona

Kyra James, Native Nations Institute, University of Arizona

Stacy Leeds, Leeds Consulting

Briana Moseley, Kearns & West

**Agenda: 2:30 PM – 4:00PM AKT - Virtual Utqiagvik Site Visit: North Slope Borough School District**

**[Transcript]**

Chair O’Neill 00:16 Well, welcome. It's good to see you and see you face-to-face. We didn't know if the connectivity was going to work this afternoon, but I'm glad it did.

Rich Carlson 00:29 We are too.

Chair O’Neill 00:33 We heard that you had some issues. That there was a storm yesterday.

Rich Carlson  
00:40 We did. We weren't certain if it was a storm, or if it was us, but we had issues. Yes.

Chair O'Neill  
00:48 All right. Well, we really appreciate you taking the time to spend with us and to learn. We're excited to learn from you and hear about some of the things that you're doing up there in Utqiagvik and within the North Slope Borough School District. So appreciate your time. Before we get started, what I'd like to do is ask the Commissioners to introduce themselves and then I'm going to tell you just a little bit about the charge of the Commission and turn it over to you. So Commissioners online, can you please introduce yourself?

Commissioner  
Fineday  
01:29 Hi, my name is Anita Fineday and I am joining you from Minnesota. I work for Casey Family Programs. I work in the area of child welfare. And I'm very interested to hear what you have to say. Thank you.

Commissioner  
McDonald  
01:53 Go ahead. My name is Russ McDonald. I'm President for United States Technical College located in Bismarck, North Dakota. Welcome. Thanks for being with us tonight.

Commissioner  
Delmar  
02:07 Jesse Delmar, a Commissioner too as well. All the way from Arizona. I am the Division Director for Navajo Division of Public Safety. Good afternoon.

Chair O'Neill  
02:21 We may have more Commissioners join us as well. But those Commissioners who are here at CITC (Cook Inlet Tribal Council) in the boardroom, please introduce yourself.

Commissioner  
Staebner  
02:32 I'm Commissioner Melody Staebner and I'm from Fargo, North Dakota and I coordinate the Indian Education program there.

Commissioner  
Begay  
02:41 Good afternoon, Carlyle Begay from Arizona as well. And from the Navajo Nation.

Vice-Chair  
DeCoteau  
02:50 Good afternoon. I'm Tami DeCoteau. I am a mental health provider in the State of North Dakota and Vice-Chair of the Commission.

Commissioner  
Gray  
03:00 Good afternoon, Don Gray and I work for Ukpeagvik Iñupiaq Corporation, I am a Commissioner as well. Welcome.

Chair O'Neill  
03:11 Again, my name is Gloria O'Neill and I have the privilege of serving as the Chair of the Commission and also serving as President and CEO of Cook Inlet Tribal Council. So just a little bit about the Commission. We are an 11-member Commission

established by Congress to conduct a comprehensive study of all issues affecting American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian children from prenatal to age 24. The bill that created us was co-sponsored by former Senator Heidi Heitkamp from North Dakota and Senator Lisa Murkowski from Alaska. We know that Native children and youth experience severe health and social economic disparities compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Although the federal government has a trust responsibility to provide for the education, health, and safety of Native children, complex programs and limited resources have not been successful to address all of these disparities. We know that historical trauma and intergenerational cycles of poverty contribute to the disproportionate health and well-being challenges faced by Native children and families today. We also know that there's incredible strength, resilience, beauty, and smarts in our Native community. We were created to address the challenges and build on the strengths to find creative ways to change the trajectory of all Native children for the better. We'll be looking at all issues affecting Native children and youth including health, mental health, education, early childhood development, child welfare, and juvenile justice. We'll be looking at data and research identifying best practices and models of collaboration and hearing directly, and most importantly, from our Native children and communities. Once we've completed our study, we'll issue a report with our recommendations on how to move the needle on outcomes of Native children in a positive direction. This report will be submitted both to Congress and the Executive Branch. So with that, thank you again for taking time to give us a little bit more information about the Utqiagvik community and in particular, the work of the North Slope School District. In addition to that, we just wanted to say we've had three site visits, virtual site visits today. They're very informative. We've heard from OCS [Office of Children's Services] both from a state level and much more from a local community. In addition to that, we just finished a conversation with Arctic Slope Native Association. So thank you again, and I will turn it over to the Interim Superintendent, Mr. Rich Carlson.

**I. Panelist: North Slope Borough School District**

- **Rich Carlson, Interim Superintendent of the North Slope Borough School District**
- **Mark Jenkins, Principal of Barrow High School**
- **Dr. Geoff Buerger, Principal of Kiita Learning Community**
- **Tenna Judkins, North Slope Borough School District**

Rich Carlson  
06:04

Thank you. Thank you. Again, my name is Rich Carlson. I'm the Interim Superintendent, and I've been here for a total of three weeks. So my colleagues are going to bail me out. And Tenna, who is our coordinator of Iñupiaq education is really going to do the heavy lifting on this. I want to say, however, that we are extremely proud of the program. I've been in Alaska for 40 years. I was here once before. And the Iñupiaq program and everything that it does is, is something very, very special. And we're very proud of it. And we're proud of Tenna as well. She does

a tremendous job. So with that, I think we decided that Mark, you drew the short straw, so I'm going to turn it over to you to start.

Mark Jenkins  
06:54

Certainly. Thank you, Rich. My screen is freezing up. So if I'm breaking up or something, someone give me a call and move on to Jeff. So if I'm having internet issues, just alert me to that. Hi, folks, thank you for inviting me to be part of this conversation today. I'm not really sure what I can bring to the table, but I'll bring what I can and certainly love to entertain any questions that you might have. Barrow High School is a traditional looking high school from the outside in and much of the inside as well. We're a four-year high school, about 330 students, cover like any high school a typical range of interests and abilities and such. But embedded within our and the district curriculum is a number of things that are specific to Alaska or to the North Slope. So the school board over the last few years has increased credit requirements for courses such as Alaska studies, North Slope history, North Slope government, and North Slope science. And in these classes, specifically, a lot of the book learning concerning the history and so forth, but also the cultural aspects, the folktales, the stories, the artifacts and so forth, is taught in part by a very senior veteran, knowledgeable teacher and then also by a new teacher. We also have a part-time position in the building for Iñupiaq Education and she teaches sewing classes and language classes for an English credit for language arts credit for graduation. So that's within a traditional framework. Kids self-selected those classes, some of them are required. The North Slope classes are required. Myself, this is just my second year in Barrow. Last year with the COVID really doesn't count. So for all practical purposes, my principalship here is three days old. So I haven't seen a lot of these things in action. However, I was also in Kotzebue prior to coming here which you know is north of the Arctic Circle and part of the same Tribal organization. Again, we have a great plan here today. And that is to have Tenna pick up all of our slack because Rich, myself, and Geoff are all sort of in similar positions in terms of immediate experience here on the slope and in Utqiagvik. Can I take any questions from you?

Chair O'Neill  
09:18

I think at this point it would be great to hear from you as panelists. And then when you're finished with your presentations, I'll open it up to the Commission members if that's fine.

Rich Carlson  
09:29

Okay, great. So Geoff, I think you're up.

Dr. Geoff  
Burger  
09:32

Oh awesome. So your challenge here is going to get me to be quiet at the end. But I have, full disclosure, I have the best gig in the entire North Slope Borough School District. I'm the Principal of the alternative school, the Kiita Learning Community, and I tend to rattle on so please flag the train if you need to. We're a school of about 30 students. We are for students who are credit deficient. Now that involves to a certain degree credit recovery. But many of the students that we have, did not, in fact achieve to the level of the high enough level of failure, if that makes sense, to be eligible for credit recovery under Borough rules. Lots of our students may have tried a course but need to retake it from scratch. So we actually have a senior,

a grade 12 student who has only three of the 22 credits required, completed. That's the sort of challenge that we face. If you're familiar with the ACEs standard of Adverse Childhood Experiences, I would say the majority of our students have between six and eight. So the vital part of what we do is trauma-informed teaching. Because when I asked our school counselor when I came new, how many of the kids have experienced trauma, and she said 100 percent. And in fact, that's multiple traumas would be true for 100 percent. So the students who come to Kiita self-select, we're a choice school, so they have to make a commitment to being here. But what we do is offer them small classes, much more informal instruction. We're very flexible about time because so many of our students have additional responsibilities at home. Many of them are looking after younger relatives, sometimes younger neighbors as well. And so we may have to have a student only three of our four periods. And then, that last period, they've got to be free to meet their family responsibilities. Some have to work in the afternoon, we see them only in the morning. So flexibility is key. And we don't get hung up on whether or not you're here all day, as long as we know where you are. So a student who has to work, who has to babysit can do that and still be a full-time student with us. Our schedule is very different. So we will operate on quarters. So we have fewer classes, a student will typically have only three or four classes in a day. But you have the opportunity to catch up with your credit situation quickly because of that schedule. If you're in a class of six for algebra, then it's possible to complete your algebra credit by roaring through the curriculum with close up instruction with the teacher in a quarter. It's a wonderful opportunity for the highly motivated. And we have found that that has served us very well, and how well, I think I'd like to give it to you in terms of numbers. We opened. Our first graduating class received their diplomas in 2003. Inclusive of that group through last year, 215 young men and women in Barrow, who would not have earned their diplomas otherwise, earned their diplomas through Kiita. Of those 215, 12 were night school students. And when I looked at your Commission's brief about things that can be changed, I'd like to talk about night school in particular. Because under Alaska statute, you age out at 20. Which means that high school is not only the challenge of getting all the credits you need, there's this artificial barrier of the 20 year-old time. And of course, last year, we had an entire class turn 20 without the opportunity to have a full year of instruction. So night school is an option for those students who need to finish their high school in the evening. It also serves students who are still eligible for classroom instruction through the regular system, but who have to work to support their family. We have a young one man, who is a senior now, is looking after his grade three brother, father is not in the picture, and his mother died in April. He's it. He is the only means of support for his sibling and himself. So we have to make sure that we provide an opportunity that works for his circumstances. And that highly personalized flexibility is really essential. And we talk about students who are at the back end of high school who are looking at maybe not making it and they're on that knife's edge. Well, if we're that blade, we want to make sure that they fall on the side of making it through their diploma.

If I had a single wish that I could articulate for the Commission, and this is just me venting, but besides season tickets to the Fargo Redhawks, I hope. Did I hear right

that one of the members of the Commission is in Fargo? Absolutely my favorite minor league team. The one thing I would like you to do is get your arms around the neck of whoever came up with the idea that graduation rate is determined by doing it on what somebody thinks is “on time.” Because kids in the situation that many of our kids are in. And Mark, I think it's reasonable to say that it's also true for many of the kids that are high school, they're going to get it done, whether they can get it done in the artificial timeframe of by the time you turn 18, or by the time, four years after your freshman year starts. That's artificial junk. The question is, can they make it to graduation? And when we look at how schools, at least in Alaska are evaluated, the construct is that artificial. The clock starts as soon as you turn grade nine. But the reality is that for many of our students, and I think this is true across the Slope, for many of our students, they've gone through, missed so much time by the time they get to high school, that the date on their driver's license says they should be in grade nine, but they're probably still in grade six in terms of academic achievement. In terms of the numbers of hours of actual contact instruction. And so what we want to do is have our graduates be judged on the quality of their graduation, not on an artificially determined ticker about graduating on time. Oh, I guess sorry, the sermon was free.

The other thing you should know about Kiita is that during the, I think we did a better job than anybody else during the pandemic, because we went to every student's house every day, we dropped off meals ourselves. We didn't ask the transportation guys who did a wonderful job with the students at the other schools. But we went out ourselves to drop off assignments, to pick them up. Lots of our constituents have no reliable access to internet because of the hellacious cost. Oh, by the way, one more thing for Congress, can we please get effective, affordable internet for low-income families? Because distance learning depends on decent Internet, and we don't have it here. So we went door-to-door for our students picking up work, dropping off work, checking how they were doing, dropping off meals. And while it's not possible for a school the size of Barrow High to do that, we're so small, we were able to. And as a result, we had constant contact, and our kids came out of the pandemic pretty well. We had one of our larger graduation classes last year. We graduated 11. In a pandemic year. I'm really proud of that.

So in terms of what Kiita does, that we think is special is we make a huge effort to have personal contact, to be flexible according to personal circumstances, to tailor the needs to the actual credit situation that each of our students is in, and to make adjustments on the fly as we need to on the fly. We say yes, far off, far more often than we say no, and I think that's part of it as well. I think another difference for us is at most in my previous school, I was always Dr. Buerger. Here, I think that would be a barrier to my colleagues, to the district. I'm still Dr. Buerger, but inside Kiita I'm just Geoff. And I think that that's an effective way to drop barriers because the students who come here have been hammered with barriers. And each one that we can take out of the mix gets them that much closer to their goal. We also partner, as BHS does as well, with Alaska's first tribal college, Iḷisaġvik College just up Stevenson. The best way to have an unwelcome encounter with the polar bears probably on their campus. The Iḷisaġvik has been a great partner with us in doing

dual credit. And what we hope to do in our role is to show students that they can do work, college work, they can get college credit. These are students who are here because they've been behind the academic eight ball, and suddenly Iñisaġvik is on their radar screen as an opportunity that they would not have considered before they came here so that's a partnership that we treasure. Let's see what else.

Oh, in terms of staff, we're blessed with having no staff turnover. And you know, there, every rural school in America would cheerfully trade their best car to have no turnover. So we're very lucky. Not only that, but we provide a real connection with the community. Two of our teachers are spouses of whalers. One of our teachers is the wife of a whaling captain. And she's about to, in fact, dissect a couple of wolverines, which doesn't happen in every school everywhere with the biology class. And that's a big part of it. There is also a place for Kiita in the in the community that I'd like to address before I get cut off. That is we have, we run a thrift store. The Kiita store functions as sort of a combination of Salvation Army, Goodwill operation. People will drop off unwanted goods. Might be baby clothes, because the children have outgrown it. Might be your household goods, because you're leaving the community. We take them in, we cull the herd and on Saturdays, Saturday afternoon, the Kiita store is open for the community. So rock-bottom prices, some experience for our students in retail, but it also it brings the community in to Kiita. And that theme of bringing people, bringing the community into the school is something that we mirror on Friday with our parents. So Commissioners, you'll be familiar with schools where parents because of their own negative experience in school won't even go past those doors to speak with student teachers. To go to parent teacher night. Not even the low stress meet the preacher opportunity. What we will do is well our cooking class cooks on Friday. And we have what we call a potluck but it's basically us providing a meal to bring parents in. You know that the tremendous impact that food has in breaking down barriers and so that we try to offer that as part of our outreach. I think I am probably reaching the point where I've babbled.

Chair O'Neill  
22:29 I could tell you're an incredible storyteller. I love it. And I love your passion. But I also want to recognize, I think it's Miss Tenna Judkins. Is that right?

Geoff Buerger  
22:40 Oh, she's the brains of the operation.

Chair O'Neill  
22:42 Yeah, I want to give her some like time in the sun. You know?

Geoff Buerger  
22:46 Sorry, Tenna.

Chair O'Neill  
22:48 This is great. Thank you.

Tenna Judkins  
22:51

Radio check. Make sure my mic is working. Okay. [Native language] Greetings everyone. [Introduction in Native language]. I like to say that, you know, I totally outrank these guys in my commitment and time spent at the district because I've been here for almost 30 years. Even though I'm only approaching 33, I started as a K3 student and I graduated from Barrow High School in 2007. I am Iñupiaq, I was born and raised here in Barrow, I have family ties across the entire North Slope. I'm probably even related to Don Gray somehow. Nice to see you, Don. And, you know, I thank all three of you for giving sort of microscopic view of some of our sites here on the district. And so what I wanted to sort of provide was more of a macroscopic, 30,000 foot view of kind of what we have done over, you know, the last decade or more, that has sort of been successful, when it comes to, you know, the culture and sort of submersing that in the education system, because as we all know, historically, that hasn't always been the case. And you know it's a really recent history, when we talk about the boarding school era and assimilation and you know, different things like that, that still affect, you know, our people, our education, and all of that today. So I think Caleb was going to share the presentation, that I'll kind of follow.

And so on the next slide. I work specifically in the Iñupiaq Education Department. And that's where my passion sort of lies. A little bit more about me. Before coming to the district in 2017, I worked for Iļisaġvik College for about five years. And then before that I worked for Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, which is our regional ANCSA Corp for about five years before moving back home. And so I've been home since 2015. I'm sorry, 2013. And I've been working at the district for about four years, going on five years. But the Iñupiaq Education Department, we focus on our people, our values, our culture, our history, our language. And the worldview sort of as a foundation upon which we provide instructional support. It's inevitable, you know that we have to follow federal and state guidelines and laws especially if they're attached to funding. So you know, Western curriculum is sort of combined or sometimes takes a front row seat to our instruction. But here on the North Slope, we like to place a heavy emphasis on our Iñupiat culture and our history and our language. So if you go to the next slide.

You know, our mission is centered around our children as looking at them as the whole child. So learning in our schools is rooted in the values, history, and language of the Iñupiat. Students develop the academic and cultural skills and knowledge to be critical and creative thinkers, able to adapt in a changing environment and world, active, responsible, contributing members of their communities and confident healthy young adults able to envision, plan, and take control of their destiny. And I feel like Mark, both Mark and Geoff spoke to this with their first-hand experiences as principals of two of our schools.

If you go to the next slide, it goes over the North Slope Borough School District's vision. And essentially, this sort of sums up the school district's and the board's approach, to contributing to our students as the whole child. Whenever we say that, you know, it's not just about their academics or progress or anything like that. It's equipping them with real world experiences and real world, you know, ways



that they can navigate through life because, as we all know, you know, students who face adversities have a very different approach when it comes to learning. And so we tried to keep that in the forefront when we are teaching our students. Next slide, please.

So within our department, it's myself and my coworker, Dora Brower. And then we have three other people or three other vacancies within our department that we're hoping to hire for so that we can have a full staff. Right now, I am sort of taking the lead and trying to progress forward, you know, in collaboration with all of our other administration and the board, next slide.

We have Iñupiaq language teachers at every site. And at some of our larger schools, we have more than one, and they teach K3, all the way through 12th grade language, Iñupiaq language. They provide language instruction that's based on the accelerated second language acquisition model. And they use an in-house created app called Viva, which is similar to Rosetta Stone. We also have Rosetta Stone accessible to our students in the Iñupiaq North Slope dialect that they can use. And what's kind of unique about our Iñupiaq language teachers is that the sort of age in which our people are fluent is sort of also retirement age. So our Iñupiaq language teachers are also second language learners themselves, so they are essentially learning the language so that they can teach the language and it's a really fascinating program. And these, we finally have one male teacher. Before, we would always just refer to them as ladies, this group of ladies, but now we have one male. So this group of ladies and one gentleman are amazing. And they're all sort of around the same age as myself, the 30 year-old range. And we're all sort of navigating as this little herd, you know, learning the language ourselves, but making sure that we stay highly motivated to teach our children. Because, you know, our languages, our Indigenous languages, are in dire need of revitalization because they're approaching extinction. And a lot of our elders are, you know, passing away, and they're the ones that are these experts in language. You know, there are language barriers, and so, we're trying to make sure that we fully support this group of teachers so that we can continue the revitalization of our language within our schools. Next slide.

We also partner with the North Slope Borough's, Iñupiat Heritage Language and Culture Commission, which is a division of our Borough, and they have these group of people referred to as IHLC (Iñupiat Heritage, Language, and Culture) specialists, and we partner with various community entities. But this is one specifically that these people are housed in our schools. And they're folks that we can go to, as you know, cultural experts, any historical knowledge that we might need, because IHLC houses a lot of our archives, our old video footage, old transcriptions from you know, elders and youth conferences that happened in the 70s. They have a lot of very useful resources that we can provide not only to our Iñupiaq language teachers, but our general education teachers as well. Because as I go through these slides, you'll hear more about our Iñupiaq Learning Framework. And I'll get into that next. So if you could please go to the next slide.

We are also very grounded in our Iñupiat values. And a lot of times you know, these are not just values of Iñupiat people, these are values of just humans in general. And so a lot of times when you look at these, you know, you can align with them, regardless of which culture or community you come from. But we make sure that, you know, these values are instilled in our students, through sharing them on posters, doing specific units, implementing them in the classroom, or various things like that. Some folks have even done projects where they've done contests where students sort of portray their perception of what these values mean to them. And so these are upheld pretty highly within our community and our school district. Next slide.

So the Iñupiaq Learning Framework was specifically what I was referring to earlier. And this image right here is the Mapkuqput Iñuuniagnigmi, which translates as “The Blanket of Life.” And so you if you look at that first word, it has the base word Mapkuqput is referred to as the blanket that comes off of the traditional skin boat that is sewn in a way that they use during our [Native language], which is our whaling feast. It's the blanket that they use at the blanket toss. So that's what this image portrays, along with other icons throughout. So our Iñupiaq Learning Framework consists of four different realms, the community realm, the historical realm, the environmental realm, and the individual realm. And then interwoven within that is included our language and spirituality. So if you see sort of, in the along the lines, there's little red dashes. That's the stitches that represent the language and each of the different segments represent each of the realms. Now around that you see the people, the people represent, you'll see one's a little bit faded, and one's a little bit more vibrant. The one that is faded represents remembering our ancestors and our elders. The one that's more vivid represents our children and our present, and our future. And so that's what this icon sort of in a 30 second spiel represents. If we go to the next slide, please.

So the Iñupiaq Learning Framework was a community-driven effort started in 2008. There was representatives from each of our villages, made up of elders and other community members who brainstormed over two years on what our Iñupiaq Learning Framework would look like. It was then board-approved and adopted in 2010. And it's the foundation upon which the North Slope Borough School District is articulating its curriculum. I also provided a link that they can share this PowerPoint with you or at a later time, there's a link to our website that shows a 22-minute video that sort of deep dives into the various realms and core themes of the Iñupiaq Learning Framework that I shared with you right here. If you're interested. The next slide, please.

So within that, we created what we like to call performance expectations, which is equivalent to what you would see with National Content Area Standards, Alaska State Standards, Alaska Cultural Standards. It's our local set of standards that was created through this community-driven effort. And essentially, the overarching question is, what does it look like to be a whole child coming out of our district? We created Cultural-Based Units built around the Iñupiaq Learning Framework. And they include the performance expectations, overarching understandings, essential

questions, and skills and knowledge. They also integrate Content Area Standards, and Alaska State Standards. And they are also aligned with our current district-adopted Curriculum Standards and Objectives. And these were created with the Understanding by Design Model, which is the backwards design, thinking about the big idea first, and then going through and building what those units look like, if you want to go to the next slide.

Each of the performance expectations also aligned with the realms and also performance levels and age bands. So when it comes to cultural knowledge, you know, I'm 32 and although I've already graduated high school and gone through college, there are things culturally that I would never identify being an expert in. And so when we were going through the development of the performance expectations, we put in these sort of tentative age bands, but in reality, you can have somebody who is not as culturally submersed as you would as the, you know, the kid sitting next to him. And so essentially, it's based on your practices, where you're at with, you know, your involvement, the things that you're learning, you know, how involved you are with the community or if your family is a hunting family or you know, different things like that. We're, you know, we're mindful of that when preparing these performance expectations. Next slide.

So, through this, we have what we like to call Project Mapkuq. And so with that, we have what we call Mapkuq Mentors and they are one vetted teacher that has sort of been involved in the program over its history and through its fruition and they provide on-site professional development. They are there for new teachers who are you know, just getting their hands sort of dirty in you know, all of this culturally relevant material. They provide modeling when it comes to implementing Cultural-Based Units. And then with our Cultural-Based Units, there are also components where the Iñupiaq language teachers will teach the language portion, you know, a couple of weeks before, the unit's implemented in the general education teachers classroom, so that when they dive into the other content, they're already able to identify those various language components. And then with the help of principals and mentors, we conduct a full inventory because the units are created in a kit format, that they have teacher guides, they have student consumables, they have materials and resources ready to go and ready to be implemented in the classroom. And a lot of them are created, you know, K3 all the way through 12th grade. It's not a full spectrum of curriculum, we are not quite there yet, one day, you know, we'll have a full blown Iñupiaq-led curriculum where we don't have to rely on textbooks from Texas, and things like that, but we're not quite there yet. But you know, this is definitely a step in the right direction. Next slide, please.

Another thing I wanted to touch on, and I think that this is especially relevant to Mark and Geoff's opening statements, is, you know, PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention System) and SEL (Social Emotional Learning), are large factors in the success of students who face socioeconomic adversities. And although we are primarily Iñupiat populated district, we have a very, very wide array of other demographics that we serve. And, you know, when it comes to Indigenous people, I feel like regardless of where we're located around the world, we have a lot of

similarities. And so this is relevant to all of our students. We work with our Student Services Department to help focus our, you know, PBIS and SEL initiatives to make sure that they're culturally relevant and place-based as much as possible. And also applying a cultural context in our trauma- informed practices. This helps foster success for students in the classroom. Next slide, please.

So I always like to talk about “the why?” when I'm doing this kind of overarching presentation. This ensures equity across the district. We know for a fact that standardized testing is not supportive of, you know, our students, and it's always biased. So it's not a good factor in figuring out, you know, how much our students know, or how, you know, educated they are, what level they really are at, because, you know, it's a different type of learning. And so this ensures equity across the district. It provides culturally responsive resources and guidelines for teachers, a lot of times you don't see that in teacher prep programs, which, you know, needs to be a complete systemic change when it comes to educating our educators. Helps communicate expectations, so when you have standards that you're supposed to teach to, you know, having a local set of standards that are culturally-based, you know, it, it gives teachers something to look to when it comes to what am I supposed to be teaching our students? Where are they supposed to be at in their learning? It's a belief in the mission and vision of the school district. So all of this ties back to that. And the importance of providing a high quality, rigorous and culturally integrated education for all of our students, the development of the ILF (Iñupiaq Learning Framework), and all of the segments that sort of were birthed after it or because of it are so relevant to our student learning. You know, you always hear these buzzwords about culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching practices, cultural safety, all these things, all of that ties back into this. And you know it -- when you are in the classroom, and you see, you're implementing this type of work and educational practices and you see those “a ha” moments that students have, that's where you know, that it's, you've done your job, right. And then on top of that, supported Language Focused Curriculum and Standards, language we all know is, having to be revitalized around the world. And unfortunately, all around the circumpolar North and throughout Alaska, a lot of different language warriors are fighting to revitalize their languages. And of course, we are another one of those groups. And then aligning the Iñupiaq Learning Framework, performance expectations and cultural content area standards, all of that, you know, it sets the foundation. And so I'm going to end that, and I will turn it back over to whomever needs to take the lead. And if there's any questions, I'm open to that.

Chair O'Neill  
45:49

Well, thank you. I have some Commissioners who are already raising their hands. So we'll go right into questions. As I know, we have about 15 minutes left. So Commissioner Gray. Mic and speak loud, please.

Commissioner  
Gray  
46:07

I have to continually be reminded to turn my mic on. This is Commissioner Gray. Tenna for the life of me, I cannot figure out why you're not the Secretary of Education yet. And just always amazed by your passion and your knowledge and everything that you bring to the table. My comments are going to be directed

towards Superintendent Carlson. I'm just in awe of the tremendous challenge that is before you. Alaska Natives have the lowest life expectancy in the world. You know you have a longer life expectancy growing up in Afghanistan and Iraq than you do growing up in an Alaska Native village. We have the highest domestic violence, highest teen suicide, highest substance abuse, of any other culture in the world. And I am absolutely convinced that the way to turn those statistics around, are through engagement, education, and economic development. And if you hear of anything throughout the day, what I would hope that you would take away from this is that your success is going to be entirely based upon whether or not you're able to institutionalize the ability to make it personal. And what I appreciate about Geoff, what I love about Tenna, is their absolute ability to make it personal and their ability to connect. The successful hunter of the 21st century is going to be a welder, is going to be a carpenter, is going to be an HVAC technician. They're going to have to have a skill set that they can contribute to in their community and within their homes. And if they want to be able to go on and pursue their associate's degree or bachelor's degree or doctorate degree thereafter, then, I think that still would continue to be a tremendous success for the communities in which they serve. But I would wholeheartedly push the North Slope Borough to consider implementing craft training as early as the junior high and throughout high school. And I think Geoff would agree with the sentiment that you know, if we can implement path training early, within junior high and throughout high school, and then within one or two semesters of going to Iñiaq College, they would quite literally enter the workforce as a third-year apprentice, and completely bypass the stick picking jobs that Alaskan Natives historically get stuck in for sometimes decades. And I'm just a little fearful of the challenge ahead of you. I'm also a little excited. You got some amazing staff, and some amazing success stories within your own district that you can lean upon and being able to gather information and look to push those best practices across all of the schools in the North Slope Borough. So welcome to your first month on the job and I sincerely wish you the best.

Rich Carlson  
49:39

Thank you. Thank you. I completely agree with what I'm getting a little feedback. I completely agree with what you're saying. Tenna talks about the entire child teaching the whole child and I think that's really essential. I feel very confident with the people that I'm working with, but we really need to do a job in terms of, you know, the old adage, you know, kids, know if you care about them, and if you don't care about them, no matter what you say, and how much you say, it is not going to make any difference. That's really where we need to start. We need to make certain that we have a passion for our kids, that our kids know that we're concerned about them. And then I think a lot of the other things fall into place, but I appreciate it. Appreciate your comments.

Chair O'Neill  
50:38

Thank you. I have Commissioner Fineday, Commissioner Morris in the queue. Are you in the queue Commissioner Morris? Okay, I have Commissioner Begay. And then Commissioner DeCoteau. So, Commissioner Fineday.

Commissioner  
Fineday

Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to ask the presenters. Well, first, let me say thank you for your dedication, your passion has all come shining through. So thank

50:56 you so much for what you're doing. And I come from the White Earth Reservation in Northwest Minnesota. I can relate to students not graduating on time. One of the things that we do is those students roll over to the Tribal college, and they work on a GED. So that was one question. I wondered if that is an option for those students. And then my other question is for Tenna, just about what could what recommendation could we make to enhance the teaching of the language? That's it. Thank you.

Geoff Buerger 52:03 I think if I could address the GED part of the question. Yes, it is an option. But the GED is a beast. That's a challenging, challenging test. And for students who are working their way through their lives and taking care of families and dealing with their own issues and needing to work. I think the GED is the hardest choice they could make. I think high school is easier than GED. I really do. And keeping them engaged in school with teachers who know them. I totally agree with the Commissioner, who just spoke about the importance of being personal. I think that's always a better option than the GED.

Commissioner Fineday 52:48 Thank you. I didn't know that.

Tenna Judkins 52:51 If I may, I can answer her second part. So, regarding a recommendation regarding language instruction. It's a beast. Language learning is a beast. And especially when it comes to languages that historically were oral languages, you know, you don't have the resources or the mechanisms in place in which you do, you know, learning the English language. And, you know, of course, there are other languages that are a lot further along when it comes to learning them. And I think that, you know, like the Native Hawaiians and even the Māori people, you know, in New Zealand, and Australia, we have a lot to learn from them when it comes to our languages. Even, you know, our neighbors in Canada and Greenland. And so, as far as a recommendation goes, I think a lot of times, you know, precedence needs to be placed on our Indigenous languages within all of our Indigenous communities. And I'll talk specifically about Iñupiat, because that's who we represent. But right now in our school district, you know, Iñupiaq language has always been sort of a second choice or put on the backburner, or, you know, whatever you might want to call it. But, you know, it's a limited resource and finding Iñupiaq language teachers, of course, but it's also, you know, the time that they get with the students is not sufficient enough. For example, in our elementary school age students, you might get lucky if you have 30 to 45 minutes with them twice a week, that's not enough. And then once you hit middle school and high school, it's a choice. It's any elective, they're not required to take Iñupiaq language if they don't want to. And of course, if they're, you know, more in the sports or what have you, you know, they'll choose art and PE and, you know, whatever other choices they might have over the Iñupiaq language. And so I think, systemically, you know, it's a huge task in and of itself to try and find other ways to place precedence on the language. And I think that, you know, we're taking the step in the right direction as a district with the Iñupiaq Learning Framework, and all of our Cultural-Based Unit development and

implementation, because, you know, you can't have language without culture and history, and, you know, everything that has to do with you know, us as a people, they're not, you know, they're in and of itself, you know, intertwined, throughout. And so that's why we tried to primarily focus on building curriculum that ties all of that together. So it's kind of a convoluted answer, I think, to your question, but it's a lot of work.

Chair O'Neill  
56:28 Thank you. So I'm going to go down my queue. I have Commissioner Begay, Morris, and DeCoteau.

Commissioner  
Morris  
56:36 Excuse me. This is Commissioner Morris.

Chair O'Neill  
56:40 Yes.

Commissioner  
Morris  
56:42 I thought I followed...

Chair O'Neill  
56:45 Oh, go ahead. Yes, I must have written down wrong in the queue. But go ahead.

Commissioner  
Morris  
56:51 Thank you. I have here in front of me that the math proficiency in your district is 15 percent. And the reading proficiency is 12 percent. I'm concerned. Don had, Commissioner Gray had mentioned teaching cert for jobs and helping youth be able to cope in the world. And if they ever wanted to leave Barrow and work in other areas. I find that data very concerning. Actually, studies show that too much of a focus on language is a detriment to academics. There's actual data that that shows that. I'm also interested in your comment that youth at times choose another, other things as priorities. I understand the school district feels that this is a priority. But again, I'm all about individuals and not putting everybody in the same box and expecting everybody. I was concerned about the wristbands. Could you tell me, so there's different wristbands for proper behavior. You called it some sufficient performance or something like that. If a child or a family or a teenager chooses to go in a different direction, are they made to wear a wristband that shows that they're not as good as other people?

Chair O'Neill  
58:33 I don't understand. What are you referencing Commissioner Morris?

Commissioner  
Morris  
58:37 There was a, there was talk about wristbands, that was on the slide.

Chair O'Neill  
Wristband?

58:45

Commissioner  
Morris  
58:48

On the slide?

Tenna Judkins  
58:50

No, I don't think...

Chair O'Neill  
58:51

Put your put your mic on.

Commissioner  
Gray  
58:54

I believe that there was a misinterpretation about the Blanket of Life and some of the age bands and then children are not being made to wear wristbands on there. Yeah, everybody has not entirely in favor of that, but we are not making our children wear wristbands.

Commissioner  
Morris  
59:14

Okay, that's what I saw on there. Okay. So age bands.

Chair O'Neill  
59:18

Commissioner Morris. Commissioner Morris, you threw some data out there. Could you just reference the data that you're, where you're pulling that from just so we know, please?

Commissioner  
Morris  
59:29

Okay. Sure. Tania , could you help me out, please? Is Tania no longer on? Oh there she is. Okay.

Chair O'Neill  
59:42

Yeah.

Commissioner  
Morris  
59:43

Public School Review.

Chair O'Neill  
59:50

You know what? I'm just wondering, I want to make sure that we're respectful to our panelists about where she's pulling the information from the Public School Review.

Commissioner  
Morris  
1:00:04

Yes, yes.

Chair O'Neill  
1:00:12

You don't know.



Commissioner Morris 1:00:14 Yes, it was the Public School Review. Tania , could you please. Is it okay if Tania speaks as to where she pulled the data?

Chair O'Neill 1:00:20 She just put it in the chat.

Commissioner Morris 1:00:23 Okay, good. Okay, thank you.

Chair O'Neill 1:00:27 So, Commissioner Morris, what was the essence of your question? So we can respond, that it can be responded to?

Commissioner Morris 1:00:34 Well, I had misunderstood. I saw age bands and thought that meant wristbands. But I do want to I want to ask how this data about the 15 percent of math and 12 percent reading, whether there is a prior academic priority in the school. I've heard you mentioned that Western teaching is frowned upon.

Rich Carlson 1:01:00 I can respond to that. No, it's not frowned upon at all. We feel very strongly we can do both. We can educate our kids to do well in math and English, and at the same time, be very culturally responsive. You know, be fluent in Iñupiaq and understand and embrace the culture. We don't see those things at all as mutually exclusive. Not at all.

Commissioner Morris 1:01:29 Okay. So do you have a plan to raise up proficiency in math and reading?

Rich Carlson 1:01:35 I think at the current time, we're working with a number of different programs. We're, to be perfectly honest, right now, we're challenged with attempting to staff our sites, we have a number of openings, which is not unusual for rural Alaska. And to get quality teachers and quality principals. And by the way, we have quality principals. But to get quality people in the in the classrooms is the top priority. I can talk about a whole lot of different programs that you know that that we can we do and can implement. But at the end of the day, it really is about the staff that we have in front of the kids. And that's really what we want to focus on right now. And I will admit, unfortunately, we are struggling with staffing right now. We're working every day to rectify that problem. Tenna said that she has three openings right now. That's unacceptable. And we're going to work on and we are working on.

Chair O'Neill 1:02:41 Thank you.

Commissioner Morris 1:02:43 Thank you.

Chair O'Neill 1:02:44	We have Commissioner Begay and DeCoteau.
Commissioner Begay 1:02:49	Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is twofold. The first question is recognizing, noticing an article online about the North Slope Borough's effort and establishing opening a charter school last year. And I'm curious to get some understanding of how that charter school is going. Recognizing Tenna that you're mentioning very thoroughly and appreciate all of the unique perspectives that you were conveying in terms of the emphasis on the importance of language and culture and history and tradition, as a part of a balanced approach in educating the whole child from every aspect of our, our background as Native people. So my first question is focused on, you know, if you could comment on how the success of that charter school is going as a newly established school system there in the North Slope School District. But secondly, we've all heard of this saying of it takes a village to raise a child. My second question is whether or not because of the infusion of language and culture and history and tradition back into the school system if it's resulted in the community being engaged in the child's education or the school system, that begin in the elders engaged in that as well and recognizing that. In my own experienced working with a lot of schools on the Navajo Nation, a lot of the success we see is based upon how engaged the community is in their child's own education, so we'd appreciate your insights on that.
Rich Carlson 1:04:42	Sure, I will. I'll take the first part of the question with the with charter schools and I'm gonna defer to Tenna for the second part. The charter school right now is not operational. We are looking at some issues with the charter school last year. So it is not operational right now. We are looking at perhaps revitalizing it. That is really up in the air right now. Recognizing it is still August, there are some possibilities for it. But at this point, it is not operational. So Tenna, I will let you talk about the second part of the question.
Tenna Judkins 1:05:27	Okay. And if I may add to your comment. Although it's not operational, when we did have students attending the charter school last school year, for them on a student level, it was very successful. I think they graduated several, if not all of their students who were either behind or, you know, needed to get back on track with graduation. And as far as content, you know, they had somewhat more flexibility in the way they were delivering instruction being a charter school. And so, you know, the students who chose to participate in the school had, you know, a lot of positive feedback regarding it as students. So I just wanted to side note that. But as far as community involvement, we try to ensure that we have community involved on all levels, when it comes to offering instruction, collaborating with returning and new teachers, and also involvement, you know, all the way up to the board level. And so just to speak on behalf of students through our Iñupiaq Learning Framework, we have created three local courses. So one is North Slope science, one is North Slope history and culture, and one is North Slope government. And those were all created through the ILF, and they are mandated. Well for, North Slope history and culture and North Slope government are both mandated as graduation requirements for

our high school students. So they are requirements under the social studies requirements. And then North Slope science is a choice for a science requirement. And then also we have an Alaska studies course that we developed. And so within those courses, a lot of it, of course, is local content. And it has to do with, you know, bringing elders into the classroom, having different involvement with different community organizations, especially with the government course, you know, all different forms of government are taught throughout that class from Tribal, federal, state, local, you know, all the different levels. And so folks who are, you know, employed by those various entities, we try to get them involved, or at least offer some, you know, partnership with them, as well. So I hope that sort of answers your question.

Commissioner Begay  
1:08:23

That's helpful. Thank you.

## II. Wrap Up

Chair O'Neill  
1:08:24

Yeah. I want to be really thoughtful and respectful of your time since you guys were amazing to, you know, spend well over an hour with us and just want to ask the Commissioners, if they have any last comments, those who haven't had a chance to speak yet. But then I just thank you for all of your work, and knowing that, you know, this is kind of a difficult thing. There are a lot of moving pieces to this model, meaning I understand within the schools where you have a lot of churn in the schools, with teachers and with administrators. This is something that we have long dealt with in Alaska. It's a conversation that when I was on the Board of Regents for eight years within the University, we talked about how do we grow more teachers. And you know, we've had long conversations about proficiency levels as it relates to the basics. And so this is just something that I think the entire state is really struggling with, but what we do know is that you know this that, we really are thoughtful of the human beings that the community is coming together to support and raise and being in the place as Utqiagvik and on the North Slope. You know, it requires different skills to be there and to be really successful in the community and culture. Not skills that you wouldn't necessarily find in large urban places, and the rest of the United States. So I really appreciate the focus on the whole child. As we continue as a state to really struggle through, how do we get to the best of both worlds, because there is there's that secret sauce there. That's really important. And I think it's all of us working together and pushing together, and being relentless around making sure that all of our kids have access to quality education. And you know that we are growing a generation of really strong, confident kids that can live anywhere in the world and do just fine. So I want to thank you, for your commitment to education, and for your passion around it. I know it's really, really important for our communities, and your relentless nature of continuing to push and push and push because no one's figured out this yet. But we continue to push on it, we're going to get there. So I appreciate all of you and what you do. I also want to appreciate all of the comments in the chat that these this is recorded. And

if there's any other written documentation that you think would help us in our work, as we move our work forward, please let us know. Any reports that you think we should read, that would be really, really helpful for the Commissioners. We're open to all information, as we want to make sure that we're very comprehensive in our in our report as well. So with that, are there any, I'm just talking very brief comments, we're saying thank you, if not, what I would ask the Commissioners is to stay on for a brief moment. But thank you to our panelists. We really appreciate you.

Commissioner  
Delmar  
1:11:59

Briefly, Madam Chair.

Rich Carlson  
1:12:00

Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
1:12:01

Yes. And we're hopeful that you know, we're doing a public testimony and hearing tonight. So we're hopeful that we'll get some folks maybe from your world to come in and testify. So I know that Caleb has all that information. I'll ask him to send the information to all of you. Right, thank you.

Rich Carlson  
1:13:21

Thank you.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**

[Transcript completed by Kearns & West]