

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

**August 20, 2021**

**Alaska Regional Hearing**

**Panel 2 – Education and Early Childhood Development**

**Recording:**

<https://commissiononnativechildren.org/media/video/panel-2-education-and-early-childhood-development-recording-august-20-2021/>

**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, and Dr. Leander R. McDonald.

**Commissioners Absent:**

Elizabeth Morris, Jesse Delmar, and 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, Facilitator, Leeds Consulting  
Briana Moseley, Kearns & West  
Chelsea Cullen, Kearns & West  
Caisey Hoffman, Kearns & West

**Agenda: 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM AKT - Panel 2: Education and Early Childhood Development**

**[Transcript]**

Chair O’Neill  
00:00

Regional public hearing panels back to order. My name is Gloria O’Neill and I have the privilege to serve as the chairperson of the Native Children Commission. To that, I also represent Cook Inlet Tribal Council. So as we get started today I’m very excited about this next panel. And this is a panel on education and early childhood development. So we have Ms. Lisa Wade, presenting from Chickaloon; Dr. Rosita Worl from Sealaska Heritage Foundation; and Ms. Karen Roth, and I’m looking...

That's right. Ms. Karen Roth is with University of Alaska. So we're really excited to hear from our panelists today. And as we begin our conversation, what I would like to do is ask the Commissioners to introduce themselves please. We'll start with those who were in the room here in Anchorage and they will move to the Commissioners who are online.

Commissioner Staebner  
01:15

I'm Melody Staebner. I'm a Commissioner and I work in Fargo, North Dakota. I coordinate Indian Education.

Commissioner Gray  
01:24

Good afternoon. My name is Donald Gray, Commissioner. I'm from Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation and I am the co-chair for the Alaska regional hearings. Welcome.

Vice-Chair DeCoteau  
01:40

Hello, I'm Tami DeCoteau. I am from the State of North Dakota. I'm a member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara Tribe and a descendant of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa and I serve as the vice chair to the Commission.

Commissioner Begay  
01:55

Good afternoon. My name is Carlyle Begay. I'm from the great State of Arizona and a member of the Navajo Nation.

Chair O'Neill  
02:11

Thank you. I'd like to next move to those Commissioners who are participating online and I see that we have Commissioner BigFoot.

Commissioner BigFoot  
02:24

Hello, this is Dee BigFoot. I come to you from the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma, where I am enrolled. I also am faculty at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. And I direct the Indian Country Child Trauma Center, and also the SAMHSA-funded Suicide Prevention Resource Center. So thank you for joining us today.

Chair O'Neill  
02:51

Thank you, Dr. BigFoot and we also have Commissioner Fineday. Commissioner Fineday, can you please introduce yourself?

We'll next move to Commissioner McDonald. Dr. McDonald, can you please introduce yourself?

Commissioner McDonald  
03:27

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Russ McDonald. I am president of United Tribes Technical College located in Bismarck, North Dakota. Great to have all you sharing with us today. We appreciate your time and your effort. Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
03:40

Thank you, Dr. McDonald. And again, I'm Gloria O'Neill. And I have the privilege of knowing these wonderful women who are on the panel. As I said that we have a rock star of panelists coming up on the subject of education and early childhood development. And we're really excited to

listen to you and hear from you and hear not only about your experience, but also your recommendations that we could potentially put forward in our report.

So before I get started, I would like to just say a few words about the commission and our charge. 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. Though 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 these disparities. We also 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. But we also know that we have incredible strength and resiliency in our communities as well. We were created to address the challenges and build on the strengths to find the creative ways to change the trajectory of all Native children for the better. We'll be looking at 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 from Native children, communities, leaders and other experts about how to better support our children. Once we've completed our study, we will 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 to both Congress and the Executive Branch.

So with that, I would like to get started. I know we have an hour and a half for our panel. And the way we've been doing this is we ask our panelists to speak and then if we could pause for questions before we move to the next panelists, we'll make sure to give you all adequate time, I think that would be really helpful because we like to have an engaging conversation. And I hope that works for our panelists. So I know that first go to Ms. Lisa Wade with the Chickaloon Tribe. And I'll have Lisa introduce herself. But I just have to say that Lisa has been a mentor to me. I've watched her throughout the last couple of decades plus. I'm trying not to age us, Lisa. And I've been really inspired by Lisa's determination to ensure that our kids know who they are and that they, Chickaloon was one of the first Tribes in Alaska to build a tribal school and Chickaloon also made it a priority that their kids would know their culture in their language. They've done so well at this that they have been recognized by Harvard and other

institutions of their work so, thank you again for being here Lisa. I'll turn the floor over to you.

Lisa Wade  
08:04

[Introduction in Native language]. Thank you all so much. I hope you can hear me. This is an important panel and such an important event, and I really apologize for not being able to come today I was scheduled to travel to Fairbanks with my family. So I'm actually calling from the ancestral homelands of the Dina'ina and Ahtna people in Talkeetna at a park, a children's park that seems appropriate. My daughter's out playing so that we can have this conversation. And thank you so much Gloria for such a wonderful introduction and so much respect for you and all the work that you're doing. And thank the Commission for taking the time to offer me the privilege of speaking with you today. I do operate the Ya Ne Dah Ah School which was founded by my grandmother back in 1992. And in addition to that, I also serve as, right now I'm on hiatus because I'm filling in as our acting educator, acting executive director, but I am typically our Health Education Social Services Division Director, and also the Council. I was council secretary for our Tribe until I stepped down to fill in as our ED. So with that, I am Ahtna/Diné person from Chickaloon [Native name]. And I've been doing this work this role for the past 15 years for our Tribe, and I guess I'll pass to somebody else for their introduction. [Native word]. Thank you for having me.

Chair O'Neill  
10:01

Thank you, Lisa. Another woman that I've been absolutely inspired by through my career was Dr. Rosita Worl. I get to work hand-in-hand with Dr. Worl on many different broader educational issues as it relates to the entire Alaska Native community. We have been partners in crime at the national levels. Well, I will always take Dr. Rosita Worl's lead. And Dr. Worl has had tremendous impact across our state on many levels as it relates to education. And she's also an incredible leader as it relates to the Alaska Native Corporation where she serves. I believe you served for many many years if you still you may still serve with Sealaska as well. Dr. Worl.

Dr. Rosita Worl  
10:58

[Introduction in Native language]. Welcome most noble Commissioners from across the country. I'm happy that you're here with us. Are we supposed to do our testimony now or in a bit?

Chair O'Neill  
11:12

If you can introduce yourself? That would be great, and then we'll come back to testimony.

Dr. Rosita Worl  
11:17

All right. I'm Rosita Kahani Worl I am Tlingit. I am. Well, [spoke in Native language] I'm Tlingit. I'm Eagle from the Thunderbird clan, and the House Lord from the Sun. I am a Chilkat from Klukwan. And I'm very proud to be a child of the Kawdliyaayi my father's clan, the sockeye. I'm also known as Rosita Worl, President of Sealaska Heritage Institute. And I've had the

pleasure and honor working with our distinguished chair. [Spoke in Native language].

Chair O'Neill  
12:14

Thank you. And our third panelist, Ms. Karen Roth. Ms. Roth has served the University of Alaska for, I believe, about 20 years and I have had the opportunity to connect with Ms. Roth, in different circles as I also served as a Board of Regents for eight years. So I really appreciate all your work, Karen, and I'd love for you to introduce yourself.

Karen Roth  
12:45

Thank you, Gloria, so appreciate having you on the Board of Regents. I have been in Alaska since 2000. I grew up in a very small community in Northcentral Washington, a population of 1,500. Just a few miles from the Colville Nation. I'm a former kindergarten teacher and preschool teacher. I had the great honor of working with the University of Alaska for 20 years, 17 in the early childhood program. I've also had the honor of working on multiple grants to raise the cultural responsiveness of Western teachers and work with Native educators across the state on grants to that with that goal. My doctoral work was around interviewing Native families of preschoolers on what they found was effective quality partnerships with the Western educators and surveying preschool teachers across the Anchorage School District on how they perceived effective outreach to families. I'm a mom, I'm a Nana to four children. And I had the great joy of raising a couple of those grandkids for a few years. So I bring a lot of passion and joy to the work I do with educators and with Indian children. Thank you for your invitation to be here.

Chair O'Neill  
12:47

Thank you, Karen. You're difficult to understand and I don't know if it's if you could turn up your mic on your end when you give your presentation. But just because it was we could hear every other word, basically. So why don't we start the panel and, Lisa, can you start us off as you're stopped in Talkeetna. I don't know how long you have with us, but want to be mindful of your time as you're in transit.

**I. Panelist: Lisa Wade, Acting Executive Director of the Ya Ne Dah Ah School**

Lisa Wade  
14:35

I'm on my phone, it's a little different than mine. And I can be with you as long as you need me because I recognize how important this is. I did not prepare a statement, Gloria, but I did review the materials. And I don't know if you just want me to address some of the things that I was thinking of while I was reading this or what's your preference for the format?

Chair O'Neill  
15:46

I think that would be really helpful for us as we are looking at issues impacting our children, particularly in education, we're looking for recommendations that we could put forth in our report, and then follow

up with when working with Congress and the White House in the Administration.

Lisa Wade  
16:12

Okay, well, some things for sure come to mind. And I do a lot of work with the public school system here out in the Matsu Borough, and then also a little bit with Anchorage schools. And, you know, we're in a very unique place in where we live out in the Matsu, because it's the fastest growing community in Alaska right now. And also, it's the fastest growing with Alaska Native people moving into our area. And some have noticed in working with the school district, one is the lack of representation of Alaska Native teachers. There's not a really, I don't think a, well locally I'll speak to our local college, there's not really opportunities to grow our own. And so we end up with a lot of teachers, and many of them who came to the state, and don't really understand the context of the historic and intergenerational trauma issues that our communities have experienced. You know, I, I think, you know, the Commission probably understands this better than most, you know, what happened across the United States, with the westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, all those things happen over several 100 years. Well up here it's happened really, in 100 years. So everything's been compacted into this really rapid timeframe for us. And so you know, that while people are saying, you know, move on beyond this stuff, we're still in it, we're really in the thick of kind of assimilation and loss of elders, loss of language, loss of all the things, the culture, you know, everything has been so heavily impacted. And across the State of Alaska, I think it's unique to each community, you know, they always want to say, things like, well move beyond it. And, you know, we'll, you know, practice your culture, practice your language, do these things to keep them alive. But what they're not recognizing, really, is that we're still combating a lot of the racism, a lot of the discrimination, a lot of a lack of awareness of, of the historic and intergenerational trauma. And teachers, I have to say, from my experience, I've done some trainings with the Indian Ed teachers, just going and speaking with them about the local context of our community. And I asked them, even if they knew what Tribes were located in the area, and they had no idea. And so if you don't even know the Tribes that exist within your area, and you're teaching the children from that area, that's, you're going to miss a lot of things, and you're not going to do a good job of teaching to their strengths. And so there's, I would say, education, the education process, the expectations that teachers should receive more training in the context of what it means to be a teacher in Alaska, for Alaska Native children. You know, they like to promote that the statistics are getting better. But if you look at our reports out here in the Matsu, they're very similar to the past, they're creeping up a little bit better, but they're not better. And it's a problem of visibility, you know, people that I've talked to, don't understand that there is actually a problem with racism in our community. They see it as

something of the past. But then you go and you ask the teachers in the Indian Ed Department, and they'll say, it's very much alive and well, in our school system, it's affecting our kids. And there isn't a lot being done about it. So for me, it's education of teachers. It's education, it's creating our own opportunities for people to be educated into the school system. Whether it's something like our D-hat problem, we've got some real creative solutions within our communities. You know, we had dental problems across the State of Alaska. And so we created the D-hat program, right, which now we have dental health aides across Alaska. We had behavioral health problems across the state. And so we started growing our own behavioral health aides through programs that were developed through the health care system with the Alaska Native Health Care System. So I think you know, that for me is one of the biggest obstacles is that we don't have a way of doing that for education right now.

Our school is special in that we end up with a lot of the kids that fail out of the public school system because of usually, poor fit. We, last year, I'll give you an example. Last year, we had, we don't usually like to take students late in the year, especially during the pandemic year, we like to keep things a little easy for our teachers. And so we try not to accept late enrollments. However, a mom came to me and said, Can I bring my two children to your school because they're having a really difficult time in the public school system. The kids were calling them names like dumb Indians in the school system. And of course, I let them come to our school because, I cannot imagine in this day and age that that is still okay. And it's not addressed. And so, you know, specifically around education, that's one thing, I think we have the same problem with OCS workers. You know, we, I know on your list here, it's child welfare too, I have so many areas that I interact with doing ICWA that I could go on and on. But I don't want to go over everyone's time. So I want to start...[inaudible]

My two takeaways I would offer up are we need additional programs and training specifically for Alaska Native people. Ideally, we could have more localized schools. Our school is so special, it's the heart center of our Tribe. And it should, this should be the same way in every community. We don't just teach the regular academics, but we teach our language, our cultural life ways we teach values, that every month we're studying our values in our language, and applying them and that is the foundation for our school. And then if we are going to have our children in the public school system, I think we need some additional training for those teachers that are coming into communities for which they have no understanding of what has happened in those communities, so that they'll do a better job of really understanding where these children are coming from. I'll pause there for someone else. Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
22:46 Thank you. Do we have any questions for Lisa at this point? No. Do we have any questions from the Commissioners online. No, not at this point. Okay. But you're gonna stay with us, Lisa, because we we... Excuse me. Oh, Dr. McDonald, do you have a question?

Commissioner McDonald  
23:20 Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you. Lisa I just want to thank you for sharing. I know that here in North Dakota, just this past legislative session, SB 2204, was passed to teach the history of the tribal peoples within the state. Are there any initiatives in Alaska that are going on this kind?

Lisa Wade  
23:49 Sorry. You know, I'm not aware of any of that. I'm in a community that most recently was actually banning books. It's a very, very [inaudible] school board that has created little space for culture for differences. So, I'm not aware of any at this time. I will tell you in my community, when we were trying to get Columbus Day changed to Indigenous Peoples day, our representative actually voted against it. So we're up against some very strange political viewpoints and in my community in particular it is extra conservative, which means it's really difficult to get any kind of representation from the Indigenous people of the area, to have a say in how we are portrayed or our history. So for instance, I wanted to teach a history class, using the book by Ms. Dunbar that was for the people's, the people's history. Right? And then I took it to the school district to let them know we were going to be teaching this and they said, you can't use that. You have to use that only as a supplemental, you have to use this other book. And so I looked at this high school book and it the only passage it had about Alaska Native people in it was it talked about Tlingit people how they "used to be," "used to," everything is past tense. So our kids are learning about their history in a past tense way. And in we've worked so hard with curriculum that was a third-grade curriculum going around about the Ahtna people. And it was the same thing. Past tense, they used to hunt, they used to do this. And I looked at my aunt who gave it to me, and said, Where did we go? When did we stop doing those things? So we have a long ways to go. But that might be a good place for us to start is looking at that that piece of legislation.

Commissioner McDonald  
26:03 Yes. And right now, just as an FYI, is that this is what they have developed, thus far is really the cultural piece. And what we're saying is you also have to add the accurate history piece of what happened with tribal peoples from first contact to now, and to really tell about the maskers tell about what happened to our nations, and why we have to why we have to go to school now, and why we have to learn about majority society ways of life in order to apply that back to making sure that our sovereignty and our rights are upheld. You know, so, I hear what you're saying. But one of my follow up questions is to your last point is are there tribal people, or are there Indigenous people on the school boards for the area?



Lisa Wade  
26:54

No, of course not. That there is no Alaska Native representation in our entire area that I'm aware of, on the school board or politically. It's a very difficult thing to get Indigenous people elected in this state in general, I think across the state at any given time.

Commissioner McDonald  
27:21

Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
27:22

Commissioner Staebner.

Commissioner Staebner  
27:24

Hello, I coordinate Indian Education for my school district, and I was just wondering, do you guys have Title VI funding through the title or through the Indian Ed program?

Lisa Wade  
27:37

There is Indian Ed funding. So I don't know how it's distributed. In our community, the Indian Ed program has been supportive of our school, for instance, they've helped us purchase curriculum and things like that. But, for us, funding in general is a huge challenge. Our school has been hanging on by a shoestring since 1992, there's no state [inaudible]. There's no federal funding we get other than I will say we were the recipient of two ANA language grants. [Inaudible] helps preserve our language, we have one of those languages that is considered "at risk" with only two elder speakers alive today. So we are recapturing and preserving everything we can right now, the challenge, I will say with federal funding, the ANA funding, it's in short spurts and language development takes a minimum of like 10 years to really get it going. And so all of the strings that are attached with the federal funding, really impact the ability to just do work. So that would be my feedback on federal funding. It's very, it's very intense. A lot of Tribes can't get it because it is a really complex document to craft. I've been in PhD training. So those are my writing skills. And it was challenging for me to write those grants and manage those grants.

Commissioner Staebner  
29:12

Alright. So I'm wondering, are there opportunities to work with your local colleges too if they're offering language classes.

Lisa Wade  
29:18

Actually, we do have an Ahtna language class because one of our tribal citizens actually finished her master's degree and started a Ahtna language class with the University of Alaska. And so we've been able to for the past, I think four years, have ongoing Ahtna language classes and we send all of our teachers, students last year, we send some high school students, and we work hard to keep that language class going. [Inaudible] get 12 participants, they can't hold the class. So I constantly have to find funding, to send people to that class so that we can just keep it going in the college.

Chair O'Neill  
30:02

Thank you. I want to be thoughtful of time. I know we have one more Commissioner in the queue for a question, and then we're going to move to Dr. Rosita Worl. Dr. BigFoot.

Commissioner BigFoot  
30:14

Thank you, Lisa, that was great. Commissioner McDonald actually asked part of what I was gonna ask about the school board. And I know it's really hard to get Native people involve because of all the history, and you talked about the prejudice and racism. But is there an opportunity to educate the school board, and to start at that level, to help inform so that they could be more supportive of curriculum? And also there are other locations that are actually starting schools, language schools and cultural schools in connection with not outside of the local school district. So, you know, Greek schools and Jewish schools. That's, that's a common thing to have, you know, another class to go to after you've gone to formal school. So is that something that has been explored, tried, thought about or anything? And then the other question is, I know that your internet has been back and forth. And you're sitting in a park, you said, How is your internet connection? And is that something that, can you speak to internet accessibility in terms of student access and the benefits? Thank you.

Lisa Wade  
32:08

Yes, thank you. Well, first, I'll say that, you know, one thing to keep in mind is that boarding schools around here happened in the last 50 years for our Tribe. So our Chief and his family, they were all taken away to boarding school, many of my family went to boarding school. So again, it's not the 1800s and 1900s. It's the 1960s and 70s, and 80s, for us. And so all of those fears that that came along with that system are still with us. So getting people involved in education is very difficult. We definitely are creating spaces. We've done quite a few things to work on the racism issue. So I actually have a couple of partners, and we host these dialogues called Back to Equity dialogues, we've done it for the police department, we've done it for a lot of the social service agencies. And what we do is we bring people together and have anti racism dialogues together in the community. And it's really helping, we've had a lot of school personnel come through, we've invited a lot of principals to come through. And so we're making baby steps in that way to connect the dots to the history and the historical and intergenerational trauma pieces that we want to get to. It's just like, it's a [inaudible]. And as far as the school goes, they have created a space for the Tribes, if we call ahead and let them know what our agenda items going to be. So it's essentially like we're invited to participate like any of the public is invited to participate. We have not engaged fully with them yet, because it has been a really hostile kind of board to engage with, and things [inaudible] that we've seen time it's the same issue. We have capacity on the number of injustice issues that we can tackle at one time. And there are so many mistakes, it's hard to wrap your mind around at any given time. You know, we had

a recent thing with a police chief that we had to deal with that was spewing racism across his Facebook page. So we had to tackle that we had, you know, women in Alaska being dragged out of stores, Alaska Native women, so being mistreated. So there's just so many really challenging things to tackle. The education piece, sometimes we just have to live and do the education and, and we're a finite number of people that can take on these systems that just have this giant perpetuating machine of racism embedded into the structures, it's just it's complex, right? We all know it.

As far as the internet services go, we actually had to transition during the pandemic to an online Zoom school for all of our students. So we were able to with our CARES funding purchase equipment for all of our students. However, Internet services across the community are really challenging. They didn't, most of them don't have the bandwidth to handle the Zooms that we were on. So we would have a lot of spotty service. We were using a lot of technology for their schooling. We use teaching textbooks and different programs so that we can track performance. And because they were having difficulties getting to those things, it was a challenge for us. Our teachers are so dedicated they would go to students' houses and study with them sitting outside, social distancing, and things like that, doing one on one tutoring, but it definitely is problematic. Our teachers that live in Sutton, which is five miles north of our school had problems and it definitely created barriers for us. We're looking into the broadband solutions to try and help with some of those things. However, again, that's a whole other huge process that a small Tribe takes on that is going to again spread capacity super thin, trying to figure it all out.

**II. Panelist: Dr. Rosita Worl, President of Sealaska Heritage Institute**

Chair O'Neill  
36:25

Thank you, Lisa. Now I'd like to transition to Dr. Rosita Worl. Dr. Worl.

Dr. Rosita Worl  
36:33

Oh, what did I do? Oh, thank you. Thank you. First of all, I have to say, I don't really look that yellow when you see me in person. And then I also have to tell you that when I see myself on Zoom, it always looks like I'm so mad. So I'm really not mad. So I'm not yellow and I'm not mad. But anyway, I'm so happy to have this opportunity to speak to you. I don't know what's happening with mine. Shouldn't we have good internet here? So I don't know what the problem is.

As I said, I serve as the President of Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI). And Sealaska Heritage Institute was created by Sealaska, which is an

Alaska Native Corporation created by Congress under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, which settled the Aboriginal land claims of Alaska Natives. Congress mandated in ANCSA that Alaska Native Corporations are to promote the social and economic welfare of Alaska Natives. So Sealaska created SHI to meet its educational and cultural responsibilities. SHI's mission is to perpetuate and enhance Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian cultures of Southeast Alaska and also to promote cross cultural understanding. to achieve our mission and goal SHI works to integrate language culture, arts and art history into the school into the schools. We believe that this approach leads to equitable education and the educational success of an Alaska Native students, as well as the survival of Alaska Native cultures, and the well-being of our students, Tribes and communities. First of all, thank you again for this opportunity to speak to the successes, challenges and opportunities for improvement in education and Early Childhood Education Development. Of course, we are extremely proud of the name of this Commission, honoring two individuals who made significant contributions to their respective Tribes and to the country.

First, may I say that while we have made significant progress and Native academic achievement, and school retention, the status of Native education remains problematic, and we still have faced many challenges. I must add that the impacts of COVID-19, the closure of schools, and the social isolation have exacerbated the problems Native students have been facing, and more than likely will erode the academic gains we have made. While infusions of federal funds have had been made available to address the COVID-19 impacts, I am concerned that the effects will be long term and far outlast the one-time cash infusion. I would like to speak to a significant variable that has allowed Alaska Natives to participate in educational system. The data clearly shows that Native leadership and participation in schools promoted Native education success. It was a stark change that transformed educational systems with a with a record of dismal failure to one that promoted the academic achievement and school retention of Native students. I will briefly review two essay type programs that are proving to be highly successful. But first, I would like to speak to Native leadership and participation in education. We believe that federal funding and program that has been made available to Alaskan Tribes and Native entities has facilitated the direct participation of Alaska Natives in educational programs and development and management. Natives and educators alike have long lamented that Native families were not engaged in their children's education. Tribes and Alaska Native entities have received federal funding that has allowed them to become directly engaged in the education of Native children. That has led to the following the following accomplishments: to design cultural based programs and curricula, materials and resources to advocate for and integrate language and culture into schools, to train teachers to provide

culturally responsive training, to create instructional practices in the classroom that engaged Native students, to collaborate with the University of Alaska to recruit and train Native teachers, to identify key areas where Native students were underperforming and then to develop culturally responsive programs to address those challenges. The State of Alaska is responsible for providing education for all of its citizens. But we as Native people had to go to court to ensure that the state fulfilled its responsibility and established schools in Native communities. Although we were able to secure schools in our community, significant disparities continued to exist between the academic achievement of Alaska Natives and non-Native students. It was only when Native entities became directly involved in Native education, that we began to see improvement in academic scores, graduation rates, and decreased dropout rates. To support this assertion, I would like to highlight a few data elements from the Alaska Department of Education that reflect improvement in Native education. The high school graduation tests in reading and math from 2003 to 2014, show that Native students double the increase in reading scores in contrast to non-Native students. In math for the same years, Native students had an increase of nearly 5% over non-Natives. In terms of graduation rates, we saw substantial improvement in the graduation of Alaska Natives, which went from 49% in 2000, to 69% in 2017, an increase of 20%. While Alaska Native student scores and graduations continue to lag behind non-Native students, we have narrowed the gap. We believe that federal funding that was made available to Native entities throughout the State of Alaska has contributed to this improvement. With the support of federal grants and the participation of Native entities in education, we are making progress. As our Tribe readily concludes that we have much work to overcome the serious educational disadvantage Native students face. But through the past and ongoing federal grants, we are making progress. We are promoting systemic change in schools that are now beginning to understand the necessity and the benefits of integrating Native language, and cultures, and cultural-based programming into our educational system. We must continue to maximize the leadership and participation by Alaska Natives in the planning and management of Alaska Native education programs that have been made possible by federal funding. This funding has become even more critical, as the State of Alaska has continued to reduce the educational funding as a result of the fiscal crisis Alaska has experienced in the last several years.

I would now like to talk about our Baby Raven Reads program. SHI is ecstatic about the success of the Baby Raven Reads program and believe it should be replicated statewide, if not nationwide. Since 2014, Sealaska has sponsored the Baby Raven Reads, a national recognized award-winning program that improves early literacy skills by translating cultural strength into home literary practices. Alaska Native

families with children up to age five receive books and attend family literacy events that are rooted in culture, community, and place. The pilot program began in Juneau in 2014. The feedback was astounding. Through partnerships with Tlingit and Haida Head Start programs the program now serves 16 communities in Southeast Alaska, providing meaningful family engagement opportunities and professional development for early childhood educators throughout the region. Through Baby Raven Reads the number of Alaska Native students consistently demonstrated phonetic awareness increased by 20% from 2014 through 2020. During this time, the proportion of non-Native, non-Alaska Native students consistently demonstrated phonetic knowledge decreased by 5%. Baby Raven Reads was recognized in 2017 by the Library of Congress, which gave SHI its 2017 Best Practices Honoree award, one of only 15 programs in the nation to receive the award. The program has received recognition and several awards for the incredible book series. SHI Baby Raven Reads, *Salmon Boy*, won the 2018 American youth literature Best Picture Book Award from the American Indian Library Association. The Baby Raven book, *How Devil's Club Came to Be*, was recommended by American Indians in Children Literature. Film producers have expressed interest in producing an animated film on this book. One parent shared, "I cried tears of happiness and sorrow when we received the 2018 Raven series in the mail, because I thought of how amazing it was that my children will forever have something so powerful in their lives that I didn't have, and how my grandmother and those others that came before me suffered and fought so hard for us to be where we are today as Indigenous people." The evaluations reveal that the elements contributing to the success of the Baby Raven Reads are as follows. First of all, federal funding to support the Baby Raven Reads programs. Through three federal programs, we've received a combined total of just over \$6.5 million since 2014. Second, we have direct involvement of Native entities in Baby Raven Reads through Tlingit and Haida Head Start programs, we are involved in, we are partnering with 10 different communities, we have are also partnering with five different tribal entities. We also are engaged with language immersion programs in two schools. We also have the involvement of Native parents in our Baby Raven program, reading to and with Native students. Currently, our enrollment is near 500 families, and we serve more than 766 children. We also have publications based on Native culture and oral traditions, written by Native authors, and graphics by Native artists. Today, we have 29 publications produced with themes of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures.

I would now like to talk about a second program, and a this is our traditional Native games. Well, these games are not viewed strictly as an academic program, nor accepted by schools as a school sport. The participation of Native students in traditional Native games has a significant beneficial impact on Native students. As one junior school

board member commented, “It's the only program that is benefiting” a population whom she identified as “at risk” students. First of all, I'd like to recognize the Cook Inlet Tribal Council for its 2016 evaluation report. It was this report that prompted SHI to integrate Native games into Southeast Alaska Native schools. The traditional games of the Native Youth Olympics includes different events and competitions. They are based on the training that was necessary to gain strength and hunting and survival skills. These games have been practiced by Indigenous people in Alaska and across the Arctic going back hundreds of years. Games include such things as a seal hop, which is a traditional hunting technique meant to mimic seal movements, the scissor broad jump, kneel jump, wrist carry, and several other jumping and kicking events. They also have the Dineh stick pull, Inuit stick pull, one hand reach, and the Alaska high kick. The start of the current NYO program for middle school and high school students in Southeast Alaska has been the work of Kyle Worl. He was successful in establishing partnerships with SHI Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Tribes of Alaska, Gold Belt Heritage Institute and the University of Alaska Southeast to expand the sport across the region and annual regional competition in Alaska. I say he was successful in establishing these partnerships when we ourselves had not been able to establish this region wide partnership with all of our Native entities. NYO has had a quantifiable positive impact on Alaskan youth reaching to over 2,000 individual participation in southeast traditional games: NYO in 2019 alone. Surveys from both the 2019 traditional games NYO and also the survey from the Cook Inlet Tribal Council in 2016, shows promising results for positive impact on Alaska Native youth. Notable highlights include better academic performance: 74% of the surveyed student athletes improved or maintained good grades in order to continue participation in NYO games. Reduced truancy: 77% of student athletes credited NYO as an incentive to stay in school. When surveyed again in 2019, 89% of athletes responded the NYO Games made them want to stay in school. We also saw improved physical and mental health and well-being: 66% of the surveyed students and athletes indicated improved self-confidence. When asked “How is your health changed through participation in NYO Games?” At the 2019 Southeast traditional games NYO, 27% of the participants reported improved general health; 13% of the participants reported a better sense of well-being; 97% of the athletes reported an increase in hard work; 95% reported an increase in self-confidence; 87% reported an increase in self-esteem. Both reports on NYO from 2019 and 2016 show promising results in academic performance and involvement and the well-being of the athletes. Additionally, the athletes themselves note how NYO has personally affected their lives. When interviewed about NYO and participation in school, one athlete stated, “I do NYO because I was alone. I couldn't find something meaningful. I play so I could feel proud of myself and get my family back into Native

culture starting with me.” Traditional games influence young people to improve academic performance, strength, and overall health and well-being and instill important tribal values, including leadership and respect, values that make strong communities and build tomorrow's leaders. Another 2019 athlete voiced these values in their interviews: mind, body, and spirit. The games help with all of those things. While we have managed to piece together funding to support traditional games in our school, the evaluations show that funding for traditional game games should be implemented as a program and widely supported by the federal government. Again, we thank the Commission for coming to Alaska. We wish you well in your continuing work. And we also urge you to continue monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on Native education. [Closing in Native language].

Chair O'Neill  
54:46

Thank you, Dr. Worl. I'd like to pause there and open it up to Commissioners and ask if there's questions. Yes, Commissioner Gray.

Commissioner Gray  
54:59

Thank you for that testimony, I appreciate it. I have two separate questions. And the first question may be directed to anybody on the panelists that might have a viewpoint on it. But, you know, we've heard before, that there's a lack of engagement from families in the education. I can't help but wonder if that's as a result of, directly as a result of the boarding school issues. We took kids away from their homes, and they went elsewhere to get educated. So they were never given the example of what does family involvement look like, in your education system? You know, and when we look at that, we're only one or two generations away from having had that happen to our grandparents, you know, so how do we, how do we re-engage or re-lead by example on how to engage families in education?

Dr. Rosita Worl  
56:16

Were you asking that of other Commissioners? Or would you like me to comment on that?

Chair O'Neill  
56:23

Yes, and we'd love to hear your comments, Dr. Worl, and then we could ask Lisa Wade, if she has comments as well.

Dr. Rosita Worl  
56:30

Sure, I absolutely agree with your statement that boarding schools, took children away, took people away, put them in homes, and where they suffered a lot of abuse. And they didn't learn about how parenting is supposed to be. And we know that intergenerational trauma that some of you have spoke about continues, right now, SHI is engaged in an intergenerational trauma study, actually looking at changes in our DNA, we know that trauma leads to changes in DNA, and that subsequent generations experienced the same kind of trauma, even though they did not themselves go through that direct trauma. So, you know, when we first identified this problem, we call in Native teachers. And unfortunately,



again, people have noticed that we have very few Native teachers, but we call them in and we asked them, I said, "What is the problem?" And they said, it's the lack of parental involvement in education. But we do not want, you know, the school districts or schools to be telling our parents how to become involved in Native education. They were the people who caused a lot of the problem, they were the ones who suppressed Native culture. And so the, the teachers, Native teachers were saying, it has to be us, it has to be we, as Native people who are, are trying to pull our parents into education. And this, one of the objectives of Baby Raven Reads was to have parental involvement. And we did it in spaces where they were comfortable. We built it around our cultures, we have what we call our baby gumboot camp, you know, and so it really has to be cultural-based to try to bring our parents into schools and to also show them that this school belongs to us. And that that school is the one that needs to change, not us.

Commissioner Gray  
58:39

Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
58:41

Lisa, do you have a response as well?

Lisa Wade  
58:58

Yes... [Inaudible] Say from my experience, a lot of the parents shy away from engaging with the school due to the relationship with OCS. There is a lot of misunderstanding from OCS folks about the notion of neglect. So for instance, I know of a family that was turned in to OCS because they didn't have running water in their home, right, they lived a more traditional, old school lifestyle, and that was perceived as being a neglectful family. And so I think some of what we're seeing is that families shy away from the school district and schools because they're worried about being subject to that hated reporting feature that teachers have to adhere to, right? So I know a lot of families that want to come to our school because they know it's a safe place. They know we're not going to turn around, we'll help them, we do wraparound for families, we do supportive services for our families, we bring them food, whenever the kids need clothes. But that has happened far too much, where there have been families who, if you don't bring your kids to school on time, you know, for whatever reason, it becomes this truancy issue. And then OCS gets involved. And you know, or subsistence, you know, families go out subsistence hunting and gathering in the fall time. And it is something that is vital to their family, right to feed their family throughout the winter. And if they miss school, that becomes a truancy issue. And then OCS gets involved. And so it's a really unhealthy relationship, I think between the schools and OCS and that it creates additional barriers that don't need to be there. And we've actually picked up a lot of families that had those experiences, and they just didn't feel safe, having those relationships with

the school district. So, I think it's a really complicated problem. And, and what I see happening is at the school level, it keeps going back and gets pushed back to the parents.

Chair O'Neill  
1:01:16

Thank you. I know that we will move to Dr. Roth. But I also would like to ask Commissioner BigFoot, Dr. BigFoot, do you have some comments?

Commissioner BigFoot  
1:01:35

Thank you, I, you know, the unique challenges of Alaska. Not that other tribal communities aren't facing something along the same line. But I think there's some real unique challenges. And, you know, the information from other places that are testifying about, you know, how history is much more condensed? How there's still so much prejudice. I mean, it exists, but it seems like it's pretty incredible. I can't even think of the word, hard to address, especially when we have a limited number of resources. But I do think that those traditional teachings and traditional games and traditional songs and traditional creation stories, that the storytelling, that all of those things, certainly enforces the fact that children have capacity. And I also want to, I guess, a question but more of a comment that I don't know how many are familiar with Scott Momaday. But, you know, he's a Pulitzer Prize winner, you know, from the 1950s. And, and he wrote about racial memories back, you know, in the 50s, and early 60s, and about blood memories, and that we carry the memories of our ancestors. And now we know with DNA, that that is true. So I think what we can say, and I think that this is what, you know, sort of has been said in various ways, is that our knowledge that we have used, our traditional knowledge that we have used, has been reinforced by what science has indicated now, that the evidence has shown that we have had these teachings and understandings that have allowed us to explain life and circumstances and other things. And so by being able to bring that forth, that that is an important value, but important comprehension that we need, you know, the society at large to understand, but I really want to commend you. It's amazing. Thank you, for all your words. I think that you know, this Commission, has heard hearings in different ways, and I'm grateful for that, that all the words we heard are very sacred. Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
1:04:31

Thank you, Dr. BigFoot. So let's move to Dr. Karen Roth. Dr. Roth.

Dr. Karen Roth  
1:04:42

I've been having some technical difficulties.

Chair O'Neill  
1:04:46

No, it's echoing.

Dr. Karen Roth  
1:04:48

Yeah. Let me see if there's because there's two of me in the session, so I got to get rid of one.

Chair O'Neill 1:05:03	Dr. Roth, do you have a pair of headsets? That might be helpful. We just hear a lot of echo with the background. Dr. Roth, can you unmute, please?
Dr. Karen Roth 1:06:03	[inaudible] You didn't hear the echo the first time. I see that I am in the session twice that, could that be contributing?
Commissioner Gray 1:06:22	Ask her to call back in.
Chair O'Neill 1:06:23	Can you try to reconnect maybe leave the call, and call back in please? While we're waiting for Dr. Roth, I think I want to ask if there's any other comments for both Dr. Worl and Lisa Wade. Commissioner Begay.
Commissioner Begay 1:06:47	Thank you, Madam Chair. And there are two issues or resounding similarity between Lisa and Dr. Worl's comments and suggesting that the involvement of parents or guardians and the community in a child's education helps to ensure their student's success. And my question in that framework, schools that encouraged parents or family members and or community leaders to become involved in their children's education does help student success and drive outcomes. Is there any qualitative or quantitative data that helps support that assumption? Or is there anything that you can help point out to the Commission that may give some credibility to how that is true. And I would say that I support that position because I see it in many communities that we work in. You know you have an opportunity to talk to kids and, and those especially that, go on and do successful things, and you ask them, you know, what attributed to your motivation, to go to school, go to college, etc. and it's usually a parent or mentor of some sort, but never came across anything qualitative or quantitative based, that gives some credibility to sort of that perspective. Any suggestions on that?
Dr. Karen Roth 1:08:34	Can you hear me now?
Chair O'Neill 1:08:39	Yes, we can. So let's now answer the question that Commissioner Begay has out there, and then we'll turn to you Dr. Roth, thank you.
Dr. Rosita Worl 1:08:55	Hello, can you hear me?
Chair O'Neill 1:08:58	We can hear you.

Dr. Rosita Worl  
1:09

Okay. Thank you very much. Well, that's exactly, you know, the data that I was trying to present is I, you know, we, and it really was not only just parent parental involvement, but it was Native entities, Native organizations that got directly involved in the schools, and we came with money. We came with money to develop programs that could serve Native children. And so what the, the data that I provided is broad data from the time period where we, as Native people, Native organizations got involved, directly involved in Native education. For example, I know Gloria is very familiar with ANEP the Alaska Native Education Program. When we first started, we only receive in 17% of the money, 17% of the money went to Native entities. All of the other monies went to universities or school districts, and they took that money and sometimes they would write proposals that said that they were going to do culturally-based education, bring in cultural specialists. But we what we found is that they always change, not always, but we found a pattern of them changing the cultural thrust of those programs. So we went in, and we changed the regulations. And we said they had to have partnerships. And we increased our participation up to 33%. And, we still, there still was the same pattern where the school districts were still not in fully embracing a culturally-based education, place-based education. So we went back together, CITC, I have to say, a strong partner, we went back, and we changed it so that Native entities got all of the money. And that's when you began to see the data, the data showing the improvement in Native achievement. Before this period, before our involvement, it was dismal for Native education, we had the highest dropout rates, and we, things were just really dismal in Native education. It was only when we became involved, that you began to see, you know, this academic improvement. And so in in broad terms, you know, the data that I provided is a reflection of that, of our movement into the direct involvement and development of programs, teaching of teachers. I mean, we teach, you know, we have a program where we teach, we've taught over 400, non-Native teachers about our culture, and we teach them to teach Native history, some of them fine, now they're talking about cultural appropriation. And I said, no, it's not a cultural appropriation. It's a shift in power, where we are giving you the right, we are telling you, we want you to be teaching Native education, Native art, Native culture, because we don't have enough of our own Native teachers. So in broad terms, yeah, the data is a reflection of that shift of our direct participation. That's when you begin to see the improvements and the dropout rates decreasing.

**III. Panelist: Dr. Karen Roth, Assistant Professor at University of Alaska Fairbanks, Program Chair in the Early Childhood Program**

Chair O'Neill  
1:12:18

And thank you, Dr. Worl. Since you have your comments written with that data that you cited, I would love to get a copy of those comments. And it has all of the information about the Baby Raven Reads, which I think is something that I know that we'll take up as a Commission to look at. So it'd be great to get your recommendations in writing. Since we only have about 15 more minutes, I'm going to just quickly turn to Dr. Karen Roth, and Dr. Roth, you've got the floor.

Dr. Karen Roth  
1:13:00

Okay, I'm hoping you can hear me now and there's no echo.

Chair O'Neill  
1:13:04

We can hear you.

Dr. Karen Roth  
1:13:07

I'm not sure how much I can add to what Dr. Worl and you shared Lisa, other than I have taught co-taught a year-long class to rural educators. These are Western, non-Native for rural educators, for rural school districts. For the past for the past 12 years, I co-taught that. And a theme that I saw often was teachers that were brand new teachers, or teachers that had been teaching for a long time and were seeking adventure. But a lot of times their motivation was adventure. And after a year of having them in class, I would see some movement on the dial of culturally responsive awareness and skills, but not a lot, which was extremely discouraging. I see Lisa, you're nodding your head. There's that continual revolving door that turnover. This has been a problem in rural schools for ever. And we know not throwing money at the problem. But if there could be a more rigorous screening process, if there could be higher salaries, maybe a teacher corps of teachers, educators, administrators who were going into villages for the right reasons if we incentivize Native teachers to become administrators that would be ideal. But this turnover of teachers, it's, it just contributes to the problem, the trust problem between schools and rural communities. And it's not to, you just want them there for the right reason. So that there could be a more thorough screening and competitive salary to have them there, keep them there.

Another idea that I think would be helpful would be to empower families and compensate them. Rural and Native families, and perhaps as a sponsor, or a host, to some of those new teachers to compensate them. I think that would be that's, that would be a very powerful kind of induction to, to these Western teachers, because until you get out of that, they call it the triangle syndrome, where they go from home, which is often teacher housing, to the school, to the village grocery store and back again, if they're not participating in the community, there is no way. What's transformative for teachers and administrators is when they become part of that community, they are involved in the dancing, they go into potlucks, they go to the funerals, they develop quality relationships

with culture bearers and with elders. So those are those are some of my suggestions.

I think what I would like to see, I would also, I would like to see, we reward teachers when they they move on from their bachelor's degree to master's degree. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could create the same kind of incentive for becoming, getting a certificate or some kind of recognition of being culturally responsive or trauma engaged educator. If we could, you know, bump up the salary for folks that have shown the drive, motivation to pursue that kind of professional development. And, you know, teachers make the difference. Teachers are in the trenches, they're in the classrooms. But I think a lot of times we let administrators off the hook. And administrators determine the culture of that school, they often determine the policy and that school. I supervise student teachers and I can walk into a school and I can know within minutes, whether that is a culturally responsive, friendly, welcoming family engaged culture, just like when you visit, visit someone's home, you know, is this a warm, safe place to be? So our administrators, I mean, I think I know they are incredibly taxed. Time is always in short supply. But I think administrators along with their administrator license or certificate, they should have a really rigorous program in what it means to be an administrator in Alaska. And not just for rural administrators, but for urban administrators here in Anchorage, and in Juneau. Because the truth is, most Native kids are in urban settings. And most urban Native families practice subsistence. And have a connection with their traditional values, and they have a connection with their families across the state. So, I really see professional development as the answer in many, many ways. I've been a teacher educator for 20 years. And often we say, "No, we need to do a better job of training teachers." I completely agree. But to my dismay, what I've seen over my past 20 years in teacher education, is a move away from allowing higher education to have autonomy to respond in ways locally that we know is important, because accreditation has become this huge ballooning agenda. And just as we want our schools to have local control, I would recommend that we look at that more as a response to the challenges that we see in teacher education. I would love to see our universities here in Alaska, and this may be a controversial thing to say, that I would love to see our universities accredited by deed. We know what we need here in Alaska in teacher education. The truth is, we are accredited by a national, by [inaudible] by a national accreditation organization that doesn't understand what we need in teacher education in Alaska. I would like to see more partnership with the zero to three organizations like Thread here in Anchorage. I like to see SEED, which I can't remember what that stands for anymore. But it's early childhood professionals need coursework to get their certification, for home childcare, or to be to work in early childhood settings. I would like to see more rigor in preparing them, not just in early childhood principles and

health and hygiene and that sort of thing, but in the history of Alaska, Indigenous ways of knowing. So they have the context for who we are as Alaskans, and who are Native peoples, the first peoples, the land on which we walk. And I would like to see a highlighting of best practices, we've heard from Lisa, the school that she's been involved in since the early 90s. We've heard from Dr. Worl and the amazing things that Sealaska is doing. I'm working with Sealaska, there TCCL. Their Tlingit language immersion, I'm working with George and Krista [inaudible], to update some of the amazing curricula in their Tlingit immersion program that they developed 10-15 years ago, and I read what they did, and I'm just, I'm just so blown away and so proud for what's being done by Sealaska. We're doing some of those things here too, in Anchorage and Alaska, Native cultural charter school, in the CITC Early Head Start, Claire Swan, and Head Start. I mean, this is state of the art curriculum, state of the art environments for young children, the family engagement models that they're developing are, they are phenomenal, and to highlight the amazing transformative work that is being done by Alaska educators and Alaska Native families across the state. Just, you know, Hawaii, the work of Hawaii is being highlighted, the work in Canada has been highlighted, the work in New Zealand has been highlighted that the things that we're doing here in Alaska are world class, and just really, really like to see those lifted up and highlighted, whether through video, storytelling, or whatever. But I will stop it looks like we're running out of time. Thank you so much for inviting me to this panel and the wisdom. I'm hearing all the stories. It's incredible. Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
1:23:46

Thank you, Dr. Roth. We do have about six minutes left and I want to be really mindful of everyone's time. I'd like to ask if there are any questions from Commissioners who have not? Oh, I see two hands going up. Okay, so we'll go to Commissioner Begay, and we also have Commissioner Gray. And those Commissioners online. If you have questions, please text myself or Josh and I will call on you.

Commissioner Begay  
1:24:19

Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you, Dr. Roth, for a lot of your perspective and input and recognizing that a lot of our work as a Commission will no doubt include recommendations for the U.S. Department of Education. And I know that a lot of your work you recognize and point out that the federal government through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has required educators in schools to practice some form of family engagement, but there's you suggesting by the work that you've done a lot of misunderstanding or assumptions of how families should be involved with their child's education and specifically with ESEA. Do you have any recommendations for the Commission on perhaps how we could strengthen Title I, and perhaps specify more clearly what it means, under directive of requiring educators and schools to practice some form of family engagement? Is there any way to strengthen that requirement?

Dr. Karen Roth  
1:25:32

That's a great question. It's a question I had when I did my study a couple of years ago on how to increase family engagement, and specifically with Alaska Native families. And what I interviewed, as a small qualitative study of eight families, I put out surveys to preschool teachers across the Anchorage School District. And what I heard from Native families was there were assumptions from non-Native, some non-Native teachers that schooling, education doesn't matter to Native families. And that's why they're not showing up. Could not be further from the truth, as you all know. And a lot of this is what's been addressed on this panel is the intergenerational trauma piece. And that just kind of gets pushed aside. Well, as I think you said, Lisa, "oh, get over it. You know, that happened a long time ago." It didn't happen a long time ago. And that blood memory that Scott Momaday talked about is very real. Another piece is that the United States is the most individualistic country in the entire world. And when a collectivistic culture, like Indigenous families, comes up against an individualistic culture, like we see in western schooling, it's a clash of values, which makes schools an unsafe place to be. And when there's emphasis is on what schools want, what schools need, when literacy materials are all school, you know, use the language of school. For example, my husband and I helped raise my grandchildren for a couple few years, and we would get newsletters at home from teachers. , "Dear Parents," you know, "your student, ..." just that language alone may seem very innocuous, you know, not a big deal. But the language we use holds, it's a container, you all know for our values. My grandchild was not my student, he was a school student, he's my grandchild. I am not a parent, I'm a grandparent. So just a change in language can be very powerful. "Dear families, your child..." And so that holistic view of the whole child, you don't have to check your family and your culture and your language at the school door. You're bringing the whole child and families and administrators and educators. If you understand just that one piece alone, that it shouldn't always be families having to come to the school, shouldn't be always families that adjust who they are, to fit into a school environment to become, you know, the whole history around assimilation, it continues today. Schools continue to try to assimilate Native children and Native families. And if I danced around your question, I apologize. But instead of relational accountability, it's focusing less on families, what they should do, and more on what schools should do. And so we have a lot of work as schools to become those spaces where families feel welcome. And also we need to go to them and look at their strengths and what they have to offer so, many ways to do that. I can share my research, I can share... I'm happy to share whatever I can.



Chair O'Neill 1:29:20	Thank you, Dr. Roth, we would love to see your research. Could you please forward that to us? I know in the queue have Commissioner Gray and then Commissioner Dr. BigFoot.
Commissioner Gray 1:29:38	Thank you. This question would be directed towards Dr. Worl. You'd mentioned that you've seen some pretty amazing statistical results on with kids participating in NYO. I'm a huge supporter of NYO. I'm curious if you are aware of any junior highs or high schools that have integrated NYO as a course, an elective versus as just a simple participant, you know? So most children and at least from what I'm familiar with in Anchorage School District area is, you know, their children are given the, the option to participate. And lots of kids do. But I've not seen where NYO has been actually integrated as an elective within a school or as an elective within a high school. Have you seen that yet?
Dr. Rosita Worl 1:30:47	I've not seen it anywhere, but we're working on it. The data shows that it should be. Again, I want to I have to always recognize CITC, because I think they're the ones that really led the work on traditional games and getting them at least, you know, as a school activity. And when I first went to Anchorage, and I saw the traditional games, I forgot the name of it. But what really amazed me that it was it was a great cross cultural experience. I never saw so many Native and non-Native kids, you know, together, you know, doing a common activity. And I think that's another strength that it has. But unfortunately, as far as I know, I haven't seen anywhere. Maybe in the Yup'ik Region, it might be, I know that in the Calista Region that it's very strong there. But I don't know that it's formally, you know, integrated. But I know they really embrace it there in the Yup'ik Region.
Commissioner Gray 1:31:54	Thank you.
Dr. Karen Roth 1:31:55	I had a teacher last year in my year long class from Stebbins, and she was involved in the NYO as PE as a credit.
Chair O'Neill 1:32:09	Thank you. Dr. BigFoot.
Commissioner BigFoot 1:32:19	I'm sorry, my internet is unstable. So I'm going to withdraw my question at this time.

**IV. Wrap Up**

Chair O'Neill 1:32:26	Thank you. All right. Well, it's past our time. But obviously, I'll give you the last word, Lisa. Just want to say that obviously, we could be here for hours. Everyone is so engaged, and I've learned a lot. And I just really
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want to thank all of you for your work and your service. And you're just such an inspiration to me and to the Commissioners. And we'll, you've provided very valuable feedback and recommendations for us. Thank you. And, Lisa, I'll give you the last word before we close.

Lisa Wade  
1:33:02

I'll be very brief. But I would be fired if I wouldn't bring this up here. Because it hasn't been said, well, [inaudible] Chickaloon Tribe tried to become a charter school with the State of Alaska. However, the sovereignty waiver issue in Alaska, we're not able to do that. So for Tribes, and tribal governments across Alaska, if we would like to open up charter schools, we would have to sign away our sovereign rights. And so we cannot do that. And so, you know, when you talk about issues that need to be addressed, that's a huge one. And it affects so many different [inaudible] from a Tribe trying to compact for ICWA, to all different types of partnerships that we'd like. So I wanted to get it out there because you know, Gloria, I'd be fired if I didn't bring it up.

Chair O'Neill  
1:33:57

Yes, thank you. And what we'll do is we'll put that on a future agenda to talk about the lack of BIE funding in Alaska and why we have a different structure, but I appreciate that, Lisa, thank you ladies. We've got 15 minutes and then we'll be back for our next panel.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**

[Transcript completed by Kearns & West]