

SB 210

Indigenous Cultural Heritage Education

Sponsors: Senators Tobin, Gray-Jackson, Dunbar



THE CHALLENGE

Policy and Assessment Can Erase What Makes Learning Work

The Reality

Teaching and learning are cultural practices.

Cultural Mismatch

Gap between home and school culture is greatest for AI/AN students

Measurement Failure

Standardized tests don't align with Indigenous ways of knowing

Alaska's Numbers

~20% Indigenous students, only ~5% Indigenous teachers

Five Practices That Strengthen Identity and Engagement

Alaska Indigenous educators identified practices that nurture cultural identity development and support teacher resilience.



Heritage Language

Teach and use local Indigenous languages in instruction



Story as Framework

Anchor lessons in Indigenous oral narratives and traditions



Land Education

Learning on and with the Land as classroom and teacher



Cultural Values

Teach through local values, protocols, and responsibilities



Micro-Validations

Small interactions that signal "you are seen; you belong"

When integrated with academic curriculum, these practices function as a lifeline supporting student success and positive outcomes.

Adaawx: "The Prince and the Salmon People"

Famine and Hunger

Village suffers; prince's companion cries from hunger

1

2

A Desperate Gift

Prince shares hidden salmon; mother scolds him with shame

Crossing Realms

Leaves at night, meets beings in canoe, wakes in Spring Salmon village

3

4

Cause and Responsibility

Salmon chief is ill from human carelessness; prince learns migration and protocols

Return with Instructions

Returns to teach respect from catch to remains

5

Knowledge Plus Ethics

Ecological knowledge is inseparable from stewardship and protocol

Identity Plus Place

Teaches intimate link between people, animals, and place—boundaries are permeable

Fair Assessment in Indigenous Settings

If instruction is culturally grounded and bilingual, assessment must match the language and constructs actually taught.

Design Rules

- Assess in the language of instruction
- Develop bilingual versions in parallel—not translate later
- Don't assume translation equals validity
- Interview students about how they interpreted questions

Priority Approach

Formative assessment projects like *Literacy Screeners for Alaska Indigenous Languages (LSAIL)*

Continuous feedback honors cultural teaching methods and provides meaningful data.



Micro-Validations Build Belonging in Seconds

Small Moves, Big Impact

Teacher actions repeatedly signal belonging, increasing engagement and persistence for Indigenous students.

Every interaction communicates "you belong" or "~~you do not belong~~"—and Indigenous students often receive fewer affirmations from mainstream school structures.

Physical Presence

Smile, get down to student's level, pause to listen

Heritage Language

Use words in the student's heritage language

Indigenous Identity

Use the child's Indigenous name

Cultural Recognition

Welcome students by clan, affirm "you are seen; you belong"

What to Fund, Permit, and Stop Assuming

Resource practices that work—don't mandate decontextualized programs and punish schools with misaligned tests.



Assessment Reform Example

The Alaska Reads Act allows students' reading skills to be evaluated in an Alaska Native language, supported by the development of the *Literacy Screeners for Alaska Indigenous Languages (LSAIL)* project



Time and Permission

Protect time for land-based learning and story-based instruction
Recognize as legitimate curriculum, not "extra"



Decision Power

Include Indigenous educators in curriculum, assessment, and scheduling decisions
They identify CID-nurturing practices best

📌 The system must align funding, policy, and accountability with evidence-based practices that honor local & community knowledge systems.



Thank You

Together we can create educational systems that honor Indigenous knowledge, strengthen cultural identity, and support all students in Alaska.