

Implementing the Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy: Alaskan Inuit Education Alignment Summit

Anchorage, AK - Alignment Summit Report



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for ICC Alaska and the Inuit Education Alignment Summit Participants

November 8 & 9 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The Inuit education alignment summit was held in Anchorage, Alaska at the Hilton Hotel on November 8 & 9 2016. There were 130 participants representing all ICC-Alaska regions and their respective education institutions, as well as others passionate about Inuit education. Inuit education and language systems have been around for tens of thousands of years, representative of an intelligent, resourceful, adaptive and powerful people. Inuit students can only learn who they are – their connectedness and belonging – within an educational framework that is aligned to Inuit ideologies. This was and is the theme and intention of the Inuit education strategy.

The aim of this summit was to create alignment between the strategies spelled out in the Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy and the Priorities of the Rural Caucus of the Association of Alaska School Boards. The intention was and remains to strengthen the movement to reclaim our own ways, including how we impart knowledge and advance an education agenda that stems from our collective worldview. Drawing inspiration from our ancestors, we worked to reignite those concepts and beliefs that originated from those who came before and resulted in the articulation of ideas for improving education for our people today. We shared with each other and learned together in a way to promote and nurture meaningful change. We worked to build momentum for those who are to come. The summit was well participated in, received and had coverage from both local and national media. All in all, it was a healing and healthy dialogue that we believe moved the Inuit education agenda in a positive and powerful direction.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Our conference kicked off with the lighting of the ceremonial seal oil lamp by Cecilia Martz, to close the ceremony Kiminaq Maddy Alvanna-Stimpfle put out the lamp to signal the passing of the torch of knowledge from elder to the youth. We also sang a song to represent the unity of our regions and our commitment to the work of improving Inuit education for our children. These were powerful symbols of Inuit culture and our dedication.

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The opening remarks were given by ICC-Alaska President, Jimmy Stotts, who stated “Along the way we have to realize that we need to unlearn some things, before we can begin to learn again”. As the conference was designed to be a sacred and safe place for dialogue and healing it was a perfect opening for us as collective Inuit to unify and begin to process past wounds and begin a new journey towards a healthy holistic approach to education for our children. To begin to break up old frameworks to build new ones.

Our icebreaker, lead by Yayauk and Kiminaq Alvanna-Stimpfle, reminded us that we learn from our elders and pass on to new generations many values and messages through song and dance. They demonstrated a dance, and then employing our Inuit value of humor had us learn a dance move and share it with a partner at a conference. Again, this activity brought us together and helped us to build trust and create a safe space. All that we did during the conference was a real-world model of how Inuit people can work together, create amazing learning spaces, and reclaim what is ours that has been lost.

GUEST SPEAKER AND PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

To prepare us for a day of workshops we heard from guest speakers. These guest speakers gave us a glimpse into other indigenous peoples’ work that has been and is currently being done to improve education and well-being of their people. The speakers and presentations are listed below; all presentations should be available for download through the ICC-Alaska’s website (www.iccalaska.org).

Speaker	Presentation Title
Graham Hingangaroa Smith	"Education is our medicine: The struggle against new forms of assimilation"
Monica Tsethlikai	"Reclaiming traditional cultural and spiritual activities as evidence-informed practice to promote well-being and positive development in our communities."

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Nita Reardon and Cecilia Martz	"From within our hearts, it works: Authentic Practices in Cultural Education"
Valerie Shirley	"Teaching for Empowerment: Engaging Youth in Critical Discussions About Identity."
Keiki Kawai'aeae	"Ho'i Hou I Ke Kumu - Returning to the Source for Building Teacher Education."
Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone	#stillInuk

These presentations all inspired and prepared us for our workshops and the work that will follow the summit. Dr. Smith exhorted us to continue to struggle to get it right, that we would make progress but there will still be challenges and to persevere through new forms of assimilation, and to keep our values, culture, sovereignty and identity at the forefront to keep us focused and motivated. We learned from Valerie and Monica that research and data can be useful tools to help us make informed decisions, that indigenous researchers can help us better tell our stories to build awareness and work towards creating new forms of education and repairing the damage done by the past in healthy ways. Cecilia and Nita showed us we have what it takes within ourselves to build the kind of education system we want to see, they also gave us practical guidance and wisdom from their many years of service. Cecilia reminded us of the CUUYARAQ, the way of life she learned and has been teaching for many years. Keiki and Graham both showed us how full immersion schools from birth to adult were changing lives for the better for the Hawaiian and Maori people. Lastly, we heard from Marjorie that we are still Inuk, still people with purpose, passion and love and that we have a proud heritage, strong ancestors and our youth are ready to take the torch and work through the challenges we will face.

WORKSHOPS SUMMARY

Day two was all about workshops, we carried our intention of having meaningful dialogue and working to align our regions around common goals and vision. The workshop day

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started with a reconciliation process lead by Yaayuk Alavanna-Stimpfle, it was a powerful and emotional moment at the conference where we acknowledged the pain of loss of language and healing of forgiveness and apologies. It was a perfect way to move into a workshop dialogue about the impacts of colonization and the embracing of culture.

Decolonization and embracing culture workshop themes:

This workshop was intended to allow participants to focus on the strengths of Inuit people and our resiliency. It also asked us to think about the role forgiveness plays in healing and moving forward positively. We focused on the three questions below.

How has our resilience and spirituality as Inuit people helped us to survive colonization?

What do we need to forgive or let go of?

How do we create a system that works for us?

The themes from this discussion are as follows:

1. Traditional ways, connection to the land, the strength of our elders, our spirituality, our values and the ability to adapt were all themes from the first questions about resiliency and spirituality.
2. Forgive those who punished, forgive ourselves for not speaking, and continue to use or strength, acceptance and adaptability to build our society up.
3. Indigenize our curriculum, set up immersion schools, build up local teachers, define our own system to meet our needs were themes for developing our own systems. Another theme was that it must be owned and supported by the communities.

Aligning rural caucus priorities and the Inuit education strategy workshop themes:

This workshop asked participants to review the current 6 points of the Inuit education strategy and look for alignment with the current AASB rural caucus priorities. We focused on the three questions below.

What are the commonalities between the two documents?

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What barriers to change are keeping us from getting from here to where we want to be?

How do we overcome these barriers?

What will it take to carry out this strategy?

What systems and policies need to change?

The themes from this discussion are as follows:

1. The main theme from the first question was that the AASB priorities were programmatic for the current system and the Inuit education strategy was about changing the system.
2. In terms of barriers the focus of funding is not weighted appropriately to Inuit ideologies, some locals don't believe it is important, current hiring and staffing requirements, standardized testing, regulations, certification requirements and not having enough local teachers and leaders were some of the themes.
3. To overcome the barriers taking small steps, setting aside fear, informing and educating the legislature, informing and educating the public, creating alignment in our organizations, and building each other up in a positive encouraging way were all themes in the discussion.
4. To carry out the strategy we will need unity, community involvement, discipline, perseverance and our values. Additionally, legislative support, establishing alternative/charter schools, and youth involvement were strong themes in this discussion.
5. In terms of system and policy change, the curriculum needs to change, it needs state and local support, our own ways need to be advocated for, school calendars need to be updated for subsistence and traditions, and creating teacher training programs to match our needs.

MAJOR THEMES

During the summit the delegates spoke passionately about their vision for the future of education for indigenous children and their hopes and plans for realizing the Inuit Education

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strategy. The following list outlines the common themes:

1. **Language Immersion school from birth to adult** – Revitalizing and prioritizing the language is the entry point for creating whole healthy, successful, productive members of both the Inuit and global society our children are a part of.
2. **Growing and developing our own local teachers, administrators and leaders** and creating immersive cultural training and development programs to support them.
3. **Developing culturally and locally relevant curriculum** recognizing that our local communities are not homogeneous and that there are differences between rural communities and cities. Standardization will not and does not work, it must be about the community. It must also include curriculum that teaches our history from our perspective.
4. **Creating our own teacher credentialing and standards**, so elders and Inuk with traditional knowledge and language skills can begin teaching and being respected and compensated as teachers.
5. **Implementing a local schooling calendar and rhythm that aligns with traditional and subsistence activities**, design the school calendar and day to match traditional and subsistence activities of the local area. Link subsistence and traditional activities to the education system and curriculum so children can receive credit through education in the field with their families and teachers.
6. **Making appropriate systemic and policy changes** at all levels that support the vision for Inuit education, there needs to be a holistic view of the entire education system to create new frameworks and philosophies for indigenous education. This requires removing the fear and being willing to try new ideas and breakdown our old frameworks.
7. **Community building to create unity, clarity of focus and ownership**, community involvement, dialogue and support will be required to bring everyone

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together to eliminate “us” vs. “them” mindsets, for healing, for building an education system/school that works for each community and fosters a sense of pride about the education system and its future.

SUMMARY

In summary, the summit received a lot of positive feedback and the level of passion, commitment, and participation was very high. There were many ideas generated but more importantly it became apparent where we as Inuit are aligned and what common ideals we are committed to. Each region worked to develop their own next steps to take this work home and begin implementing it at the local levels and to begin influencing policy at the state and federal level. Overall you could sense that the energy, passion, positivity and healing of the event was going to carry us well into the future. In the appendix, you will find a link to photos of all the flipcharts and other pictures taken during the summit, additionally you will find each regions list of next steps (Some regions were not labeled, so please help me to identify them).

Quyana, Quyanaqpak, Taikuu!

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Appendix:

Photo album link – contains all flipchart pictures, group photos, and other photos captured during the summit.

<https://goo.gl/photos/KUQPik26cCNtPmgQA>

Regional next steps:

Unlabeled written in green ink:

1. Indigenize education
 - a. Get the Maori, Hawaiian philosophy
 - b. Incorporate into teacher education, classrooms, communities, etc
2. Do we have our own teacher education program?
3. How do we bridge the gap between the western education systems and indigenous epistemologies?

Yukon Kuskokwim:

Yuuyaraq

1. Support immersion
 - a. Grow it
 - b. Strong leaders
 - c. Look at models
 2. Work together
 - a. Communities
 - b. Region-wide
 3. Know history
 - a. BIA
 - b. State
 4. Share information
 - a. Handouts
 - b. All meeting in Bethel
 5. Build curriculum
 - a. Share within schools
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6. Set meetings
 - a. In village schools
 - b. Conversations in villages
 7. Build partnerships
 - a. Tribes
 - b. School districts
- “We need partners” – Lillian Olson, “Be heard” Loddie Jones, “We all need support”
Kate Thompson, “Keep the wheel turning” – Loddie Jones

Black ink – references Yupik Language

1. Create immersion school
2. All board members need to agree
3. Create teacher training
4. Grow your own teachers
5. Type M certification
6. Change the calendar
7. Find people who can speak and write Yup'ik language
8. Create your own system

University System:

1. Within school of education(s) create indigenous teachers/prep
 - a. Requires recognition of native autonomy and right to self determination and have their own criteria
 - b. Administrator prep – professional development
 - c. Special education – professional development
 - d. Elementary and secondary education
 - e. Adult educations (Not in the school of education, in the status quo)
 2. All teachers prepared in Alaska are prepared to teach indigenous students because this would serve all students well
 3. Augmented mission: The university of Alaska system inspires learning and advances and disseminates indigenous knowledge through teaching, research and public service – Just moving the “North and its diverse people from a caveat to its proper place in the mission.
 4. Support for Native students when they get to the university – retention and helping them adapt to culture change
 5. Alaska studies (high school) needs to be way more than colonial history.
 6. Support mentoring, feel good, connect to other things they need, find their place in studying language, culture, econ., etc.
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7. Critical look at requirements for PhD, P & T of faculty, develop curricula, service should get credit for this work too. It is possible to change the criteria (NZ)
8. Year round school with subsistence based calendar (Good for students of all ages, families.)

Bering Straits Region:

1. Language summit for our region
 2. School board get familiar with Inuit strategies, district adopt these policies BSSD & NPS
 3. Focus on our youth – we need immersion school
 4. Sensory Inuit in our schools/classrooms
 5. We need to provide BSSD/NPS greater professional development for our teachers with Inuit foundation
 6. Our elders and community needs to teach the kids. Not from the school board (Down → Up). Turn the old people into elders, Time is now elders are passing.
 7. Change educators thinking → Indigenous knowledge is important to everyone
 8. Put our language, culture, and traditional values into our academics
 9. More motivational Inuit Speakers in our schools
 10. Graduation requirements – your culture and your language to graduate as part of your identity
 11. Parent leadership guiding our school system – In charge!
 12. Teach pre-k parent and grandparent teaching our language to follow into home life → starts at home
 13. Preserve our language and document
 14. NPS & BSSD in alignment/ partnership in our region
 15. True Alaskan history taught in our classrooms – students know our history fighting discrimination “No natives allowed” – historical trauma
 16. Getting our communities together to get our priorities accomplished – Bering straits task force, parents and interested people
 17. Need Inupiaq / Yupik curriculum values, our ways of life, areas, rivers, land sites
 18. Prioritize, timeline, assign people, set goals
 19. Templates to fill in our dialects – have all three dialects, learn Yu’pik, Inupiaq, St. Lawrence Island Yupik – Multi-lingual
 20. Honor dialect – have words that go across
 21. Share with each other
 22. Encourage fluent speakers to speak to English speakers first in our language then translate it
 23. Sub committees, North and south Nome work together
 24. School district to use technology to preserve
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25. Katirivik Cultural Center – Utilize it
26. Hire a grant writer to obtain funds to complete these goals
27. Go back to using our original names for locations

North Slope:

1. Calendar change
2. ECE Immersion
 - a. Teacher training
 - b. Elders
 - c. Grow our own
 - d. Parents learning too
3. Summer session – Inupiaq school in country with community and young people
4. Credit for cultural activities
5. Put education on the table with other organizations
6. A student summit to allow adults to hear from students
7. Follow up on education entities – 2016 joint meeting on education
8. Push Alaska Native history for all at the state level
9. A statewide native education clearing house of ideas and programs