

ALASKAN INUIT
EDUCATION
IMPROVEMENT
STRATEGY



INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR
COUNCIL-ALASKA

2015



ABOUT ICC-ALASKA

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL – ALASKA

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)-Alaska is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization that exists to be the unified voice and collective spirit of Alaskan Inuit, to promote, protect and advance Inuit culture and society. ICC-Alaska's membership includes regional organizations who represent the Inupiat of the North Slope, Northwest, and Bering Straits; the St. Lawrence Island Yupik; the Central Yup'ik and Cup'ik of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Region. Member organizations include the North Slope Borough, Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, Northwest Arctic Borough, Maniilaq Association, NANA Regional Corporation, Kawerak, Incorporated, Bering Straits Native Corporation, and the Association of Village Council Presidents. ICC-Alaska is a national member of ICC International, an international, indigenous non-governmental organization. ICC strives to strengthen unity among Inuit of the circumpolar north; promote Inuit rights and interests on an international level; develop and encourage long-term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment; and seek full and active partnership in the political, economic, and social development of the circumpolar north. ICC was founded in 1977 and holds Consultative Status II within the United Nations Social and Economic Council. ICC is a Permanent Participant at the Arctic Council.

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SPONSORS

Thank you to our funders for believing in the importance of developing an Alaskan Inuit Education Strategy:





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INTRODUCTION

OVERARCHING GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE ALASKAN INUIT EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

In September, 2013, the Inuit Circumpolar Council – Alaska initiated the development of the Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy which was identified as a priority in the ICC-Alaska Strategic Plan 2010-2014. In so doing, ICC-Alaska was responding to the Nuuk Declaration of the ICC International (2010 – 2014, and renewed for 2014- 2018), which calls for sharing of best practices across the circumpolar Arctic, the development and improvement of culturally appropriate curriculum, and inclusion of Inuit languages as a critical component of education.

THE ICC-ALASKA EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE

An Education Steering Committee was selected to lead the process to develop an Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy. The Education Steering Committee is representative of the four Inuit regions of Alaska: North Slope, Northwest Arctic, Bering Strait, and Southwest. Notably, the Steering Committee also includes a strong youth voice. Once the process began, the Steering Committee met several times to plan a two-day Education Workshop in Nome, April 16-17, 2014. Invited delegates and guests included Alaska Inuit leaders, education experts and practitioners, parents, students and community members. Twenty five delegates with a broad range of experience and community roles participated in the Education Workshop.

ICC-ALASKA EDUCATION WORKSHOP

The workshop goals were: 1) to define education success from an Inuit perspective, 2) review the current state of Inuit education in Alaska, 3) identify recommendations for the improvement of Inuit education. The Steering Committee met throughout the fall of 2014 and winter of 2015 to turn the Education Workshop recommendations into a strong Education Strategy and Action Plan with measurable objectives. The complete Education Workshop report is available online at <http://www.iccalaska.org>.

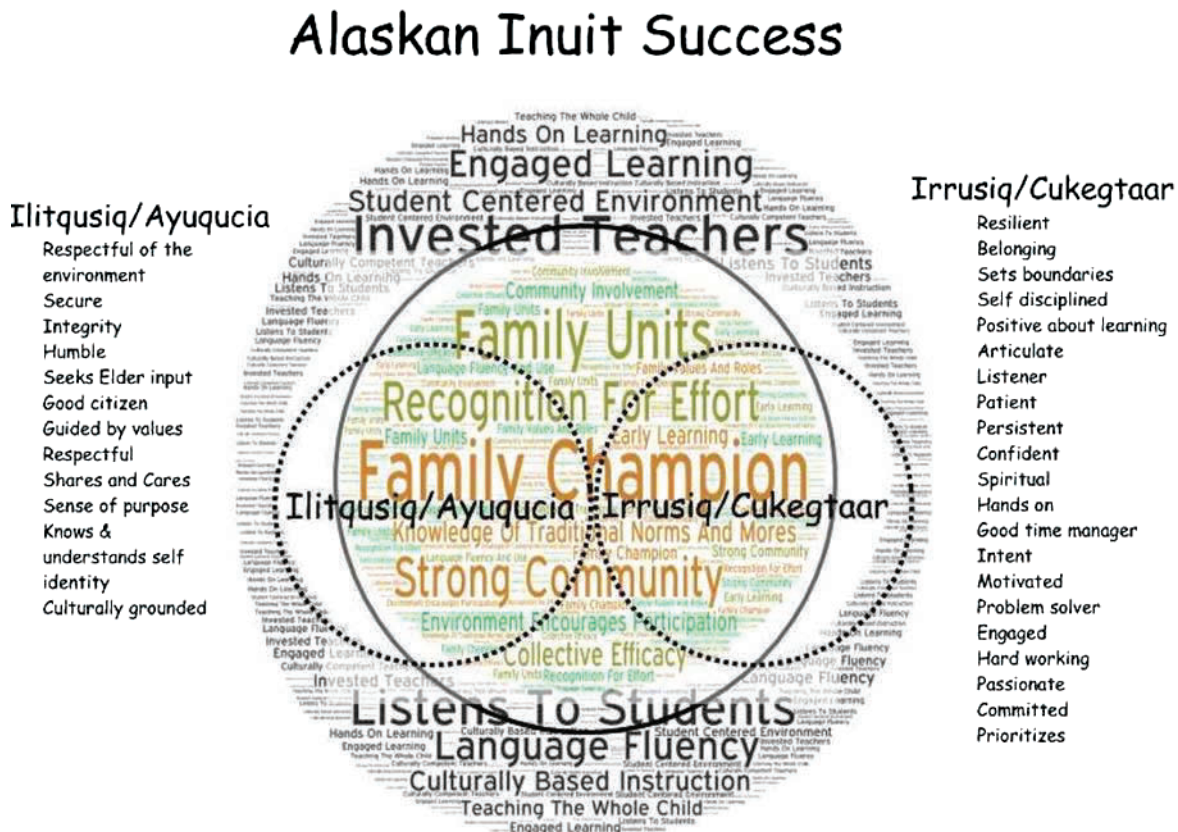
The culminating Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy is intended to serve as an advocacy tool to improve Inuit education in Alaska, per the Nuuk Declaration objectives. Given the broad representation in crafting the Strategies, it is the hope of ICC-Alaska that this document will provide support for the initiatives and activities of local, regional, and statewide efforts.

INUIT STUDENT SUCCESS

WHAT DOES SUCCESS FOR ALASKAN INUIT STUDENTS LOOK LIKE?

Education Workshop delegates agreed on some interconnected intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to the development of a well-rounded person. An individual's attitude, emotions, and actions are intertwined with personality, motive, and goodness. Family and community influence are essential for Inuit student success. The elements of success for Alaskan Inuit students that form the foundation of the six Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategies is shown graphically in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. THE INTERCONNECTED ELEMENTS OF ALASKAN INUIT STUDENT SUCCESS



“We need to teach to the whole person.”

-Aviaja Lyngé,

Institute of Learning Processes, University of Greenland



FOUNDATIONAL VALUES

THE TRUTHS WE HOLD DEAR ARE SO FOUNDATIONAL TO ONE'S BEING THAT
THEY ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE.

THE TRUTHS WE HOLD DEAR: THE FOUNDATIONAL VALUES FOR INUIT STUDENT SUCCESS

The Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy was developed based on the following foundational values identified by the Education Workshop delegates.

- Every person can learn
- We want to reclaim our own ways, including how we impart knowledge
- We value family and community engagement
- Students need to learn about and develop pride in their self-identity
- Students need to develop respect for Elders and the cultural knowledge and identity they can impart
- We want school authorities to understand the student perspective
- We want teachers to be more supportive of students
- We need to teach teachers things they don't know about our communities when they come here

“We have educated our children for millennia. This is not something new to us. We have taught them to not only know the fundamentals of how to make a living, but we also instill them with the spirit to be Inuit. Our children should succeed not in spite of the system, but because of it.”

*-Melanie Bahnke, President
Kawerak, Inc.*



ABOUT THE STRATEGY

ABOUT THE ALASKAN INUIT EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

The Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy has six individual strategies. Each strategy is presented individually on the following pages. There are accompanying objectives and suggested action steps for each strategy. They represent a collective call to action – no one agency, organization, or group can or should feel responsible to achieve every identified outcome. It is by combining efforts that we will achieve a common desired outcome – improvement of education, in its very broadest sense, for Alaskan Inuit children. The process begins with each person deciding to make a difference, to be accountable for the next generation. Individuals form groups taking action within their community, holding the community accountable, which holds schools, tribal organizations, and governing bodies accountable to take action.

“Keep the community in mind. Improve collaboration among the stakeholders and move the Inuit people to be a modern people firmly rooted in ancient traditions.”

-Jim Stotts, ICC-Alaska President

THE INDIVIDUAL ALASKAN INUIT EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

1. Promote the indigenization of education frameworks to more clearly align with Inuit ideologies.
2. Suggest, advocate for, and influence policies related to Inuit education.
3. Research, advocate for, and promote the development, implementation, and sharing of culture-based curriculum that focuses on students’ identity as Inuit.
4. Promote Inuit language education.
5. Foster educational leadership capacity among Alaska Inuit.
6. Revitalize and reclaim traditional Inuit parenting skills.

1. Promote the indigenization of education frameworks to more clearly align with Inuit ideologies.

STRATEGY 1: INDIGENIZATION OF EDUCATION FRAMEWORKS

Strategy 1 is foundational to the other strategies. It reflects a strong desire for decolonization and reclamation of Inuit ideologies. Strategy 1 encourages educators to develop awareness about the deleterious effects of colonization, establish a research and knowledge base, and form alliances to promote indigenization.

BACKGROUND FOR STRATEGY 1

Inuit educational 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.

After hearing from two international Inuit leaders, Aviaja Lynge from Greenland and Jodie Lane from Canada, Education Workshop delegates found that related to self-determination, Alaska Inuit are not reclaiming their identity and exercising self-determination; there has been too much colonization and assimilation; education policies do not reflect an Inuit worldview; and individually and collectively, Inuit people are not living their traditional values thoroughly. Solutions to these issues need to come from the creation and implementation of policies and actions related to self-governance.

The foregoing discussion resulted in Strategy 1, viewed as a critical first step before the other strategies could be actualized.

STRATEGY 1

Education Workshop delegates suggested a variety of actions to operationalize the strategy, such as asking individuals to assume personal responsibility – to achieve a mental freeing from colonization; to develop a personal interest and involvement in policy issues; to gather evidence related to the effects of colonization, both within Alaska and internationally; to learn to use the structure of resolutions to achieve policy change; and, to know that the effort to indigenize education frameworks starts within individuals.

OBJECTIVES RELATED TO STRATEGY 1

The three objectives related to Strategy 1 include:

- 1) Create awareness about the effects of colonization and encourage individuals to assume personal responsibility for positive change in education;
- 2) Encourage research and study indigenization efforts in education worldwide for potential application in Inuit homelands; and
- 3) Form alliances with other indigenous groups/organizations who are involved in self-determination/indigenization efforts in education to benefit their people.

ACTION STEPS FOR STRATEGY 1

Ideas for action steps to achieve the objectives of Strategy 1 might include any of the following:

- Seek out and offer support to groups willing to sponsor “Decolonization Think Tanks” to forge Inuit determination of educational pedagogy and measures of student success.
- Develop partnerships between Inuit researchers and students, and institutions of higher education to broaden and deepen the body of Inuit research.
- Form alliances with like-minded indigenous groups and organizations to achieve similar objectives and outcomes.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Once implemented, this strategy will increase the body of research conducted by Inuit researchers as a basis for policy and action. Another outcome will be awareness, coordination and collaboration among Inuit organizations to achieve similar objectives. Most important, implementation of Strategy 1 will result in Inuit determination of educational pedagogy, instructional content, and success for Inuit students.

2. Suggest, advocate for, and influence policies related to Inuit education.

STRATEGY 2: EDUCATION POLICY INFLUENCE

Strategy 2 was developed with the realization that formalized schooling of Inuit children occurs within a framework that can and should be influenced at the policy level to effect lasting change. Similar to the first strategy, policy change can best be achieved through collective action and alliances among like-minded groups, and use of resolution processes.

BACKGROUND FOR STRATEGY 2

“The inclusion of indigenous perspectives in policy is crucial to the attainment of true self-determination.”

Pausauraq Jana Harcharek, Director of Iñupiaq Education, North Slope Borough School District and Education Steering Committee Member

Education Workshop delegates noted that Inuit cultural presence at home, in the community, and at school has eroded over time in three ways: 1) Elders are not honored and accorded traditional respect that is due to them; 2) There is not a strong cultural presence in schools; and 3) there is a disconnect between the State, communities, and schools. Actions to address these gaps will take community involvement. Sustained development and implementation of curriculum that is relevant to Inuit is dependent on education policy. Local and regional advisory school boards can provide essential insight for creating local curriculum resources.

“We have the ability and responsibility to find solutions that work for our communities – the total community. We need to look at the topic of education holistically. In other words, from the Inuit point of view, from our own cultural perspective.”

-Jim Stotts, ICC-Alaska President

OBJECTIVES RELATED TO STRATEGY 2

The two objectives to achieve the education policy advocacy strategy are:

- 1) Create alliances with other organizations and groups who are engaged in efforts to influence policy to improve Inuit education, and
- 2) Look for opportunities to effectuate education change through the resolution processes of other organizations.

ACTION STEPS FOR STRATEGY 2

Some action steps that might accomplish the Strategy 2 objectives include,

- Look for intersections between this Alaskan Inuit Education Improvement Strategy and similar plans of other organizations.
- Support a strategic alignment workshop at the Rural Caucus of Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB), to provide a venue for Inuit organizations to facilitate strategic alignment.
- Look for opportunities to effectuate education change through the resolution processes of your organization. In solidarity with like-minded groups, we can achieve the outcome of improved education policy for Inuit children.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Implementation of this strategy will result in a process for strategy alignment across Inuit groups, to better coordinate efforts related to the improvement of education for Inuit children. Ultimately the outcome will be better education policy that mirrors the collective voice of the Inuit community related to educational aspirations and expectations for children and honors the learning needs of Inuit children.

“We need to change teachers’ behavior and develop a cultural pedagogy. It needs to be collective and based in culture; developmental and innovative while keeping culture alive. We can make a new system using the old one – repaint, resew and adapt to get the new system.”

*-Aviaja Lynge,
Institute of Learning Processes, University of Greenland*

3. Research, advocate for and promote the development, implementation, and sharing of culture-based curriculum that focuses on students' identity as Inuit.

STRATEGY 3: CULTURE-BASED CURRICULUM

“When Inuit students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they will excel academically. When Inuit students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, teaching will become an honorable profession and Inuit students will choose to become teachers.”

*Pausauraq Jana Harcharek, Director of Iñupiaq Education,
North Slope Borough School District
and Education Steering Committee Member*

Strategy 3 builds on the policy foundation of Strategy 2 by calling for culturally-relevant curriculum for Inuit students. The objectives associated with this strategy demonstrate recognition that there are pockets of excellent curriculum resources already development that could be shared with others. The objectives call for creating and disseminating culture-based instructional materials, supplemented as appropriate with teaching strategies aligned to Inuit pedagogical philosophy.

BACKGROUND FOR STRATEGY 3

Related to the structure of schooling, Education Workshop delegates noted that control of schools is governed by Western laws; school time is limited and finite for instruction; and there is a limited pool of resources for Native language and education. Solutions to these gaps require community engagement and increased interest in and responsibility for becoming formal as well as informal educators – everyone can engage in teaching others.

There are examples of best practices in Inuit education across Alaska, both within the Western-structured school system as well as natural education opportunities organized by communities and local groups. Inuit ways of knowing should provide the framework for standards and subject matter taught to Inuit children because those ways of knowing are the schema to which all new knowledge and information can be attached. The Inuit ways of knowing transform education into understanding.

OBJECTIVES RELATED TO STRATEGY 3

The three objectives of Strategy 3 focus on the collection, creation, and use of culture-based curriculum resources:

- 1) Research and disseminate information about Inuit resources already developed;
- 2) Encourage individuals and organizations to create Inuit educational resources; and
- 3) Advocate for the implementation of locally produced Inuit educational resources. This will increase the Inuit-specific educational resources in use by schools and educators throughout the four Alaska Inuit regions.

ACTION STEPS FOR STRATEGY 3

Suggested action steps related to the culturally-based curriculum strategy include:

- Creation of a Traditional Knowledge Clearing House specifically for Inuit research and resources. The effort should be directed at gathering resources not already found elsewhere, to avoid duplication with the work of others.
- Sharing of culture-based resources and instructional strategies as appropriate for Inuit children should be encouraged across regions and schools/districts. Protocols would need to be developed both for sharing and accessing curriculum materials.
- Individuals and organizations should be encouraged to create appropriate resources, using local knowledge.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

When implemented, this strategy will result in a virtual cache (sigluaq) of Inuit resources that is unduplicated elsewhere and available for all to use. Educational agencies and for-profit and non-profit Inuit organizations will join in creating and promoting the use of appropriate Inuit-based instructional resources. The use of locally produced Inuit educational resources in formal school settings will increase.

4. Promote Inuit language education.

STRATEGY 4: INUIT LANGUAGE EDUCATION

“It is essential to use the Inuit language to communicate the rich and complex meaning of Inuit ideology. There are so many concepts that cannot be expressed adequately or accurately when they must first be translated into English.”

*Bernadette Yaayuk Alvanna-Stimpfle
Eskimo Heritage Program Director, Kawerak, Inc.
and Education Steering Committee member*

BACKGROUND FOR STRATEGY 4

Inuit communication gets meaning not only from words but also body language, mood, ways of behaving, norms, and the situation. Much is implied and hinted rather than said, in direct contrast to Western communication where more of the message is contained in words. When Inuit children face this difference in communication with their Western teachers, they are at risk of being labeled as shy, quiet, withdrawn – or worse – as incapable of learning.

Education Workshop delegates lamented that communication in the Inupiaq, Yup’ik, and Cup’ik languages is diminishing in both the home and in the community. Further, Inuit students can either write their Native language but not speak it fluently, or vice versa. Native language classes in many schools are elective and optional, but not required. Delegates attributed a breakdown in communication between generations to loss of language.

OBJECTIVES RELATED TO STRATEGY 4

The delegates and Steering Committee were cognizant and appreciative of the work underway by the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council (ANLPAC), and expressed interest in amplifying the impact of that work in the Inuit regions of Alaska. Therefore, the singular objective of Strategy 4 is recommended collaboration and an alliance with ANLPAC to support language revitalization efforts. The objectives of ANLPAC are inclusive of language education for students.

ACTION STEPS FOR STRATEGY 4

Suggested action steps for individuals and groups that might accomplish the Strategy 4 objectives include,

- Become knowledgeable about the existing indigenous Immersion programs that promote language fluency and help teach the general population about school choices and options.
- Look for and communicate availability of experts on the subject of indigenous Immersion school choice who can answer community questions.
- Write a blog post about the Immersion Schools; feature their successes.
- Draft organizational proposals to ANLPAC offering to collaborate to achieve the five recommendations in their Report to the Governor and Legislature.
- Participate in the ANLPAC meetings to the extent that they are open to the public.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The anticipated outcome from implementation of Strategy 4 is best summed up by a youth panel member from the Education Workshop:

“Success to me is learning about my language and culture and being able to teach it to another generation so it doesn’t die or go away.”

5. Foster educational leadership capacity among Alaska Inuit.

STRATEGY 5: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

“Leadership means doing the foundational work for the benefit of future generations. Inuit leadership can be built by modeling to younger generations – planting and nurturing the seeds of leadership will ensure the continuance of vibrant indigenous ideologies related to education.”

*Bernadette Yaayuk Alvanna-Stimpfle
Eskimo Heritage Program Director, Kawerak, Inc.
and Education Steering Committee member*

Strategy 5 addresses the dearth of Inuit representation in the ranks of education leadership. Leadership skills are cultivated and leaders emerge when individuals have opportunities to talk in groups about important education-related issues. Inuit Elders are a wise and experienced group of potential mentors for young, aspiring leaders. The objectives and actions related to leadership development show recognition that leadership in education occurs at many levels and can be either formal or informal, ad hoc or with a defined purpose and period of time.

BACKGROUND FOR STRATEGY 5

Currently, many education leadership positions in Inuit communities are filled by non-Inuit individuals. Education Workshop delegates recognized the need to nurture the leadership skills of young people by giving them opportunities to lead, under the tutelage and guidance of Inuit Elders.

Workshop delegates broadly defined educational leadership to include teacher leaders, administrators, local and regional school board members, appointed and elected education officials, agency and organizational managers with education responsibilities. Further, leadership opportunities were identified as both big and small, of both short and long duration. Specific examples of opportunities to develop leadership capacity include participation in the development of new educator evaluation standards and tools to include

cultural standards, and participation in the development of new student assessments that Inuit students must take as part of the formal schooling process. A focus on Inuit educational leadership development at the local level has an ancillary benefit of bringing important education topics to a grassroots level for discussion, creating better informed communities.

OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY 5

The objectives to achieve Strategy 5 include:

- 1) Look for opportunities to discuss important education-related issues; and
- 2) Encourage Inuit candidates to seek public office and/or positions on boards and commissions (as well as ad hoc leadership opportunities) in education.

ACTION STEPS FOR STRATEGY 5

To achieve Strategy 5, organizations, agencies, and groups of Inuit community members should be encouraged to apply for leadership positions to further the dialogue at the local and regional levels about education issues. This is a sound methodology for nurturing and mentoring future leaders. Vacancies on boards and commissions should be broadly advertised and communicated as they become available, as a way to encourage more Inuit applicants and grow the representation of Inuit leaders in influential educational roles. Similarly, those in a position of influence should take on the responsibility to encourage and nurture future leaders, and assist them where there are formal requirements for appointment to leadership positions.

Suggested action steps for individuals and groups that might accomplish the Strategy 5 objectives include,

- Create an awareness message so that interested individuals will know how and where to apply for vacancies on boards and commissions.
- Following the traditional concept of Qargi and Qasgiq, encourage local groups to host opportunities for dialogue about important education issues, develop cohesiveness, and mentor local leaders.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The anticipated outcome from a focus on leadership development is more Alaskan Inuit in positions of leadership at all levels of educational influence.

“Show people the endless opportunities the Inuit have. Being who you are can take you places.”

*-Madelyn Alvanna-Stimpfle, Student
Member of the Education Steering Committee*

6. Revitalize and reclaim traditional Inuit parenting skills.

STRATEGY 6: TRADITIONAL PARENTING SKILLS

“Our strength comes from our ancestors. We look to them and honor them in our quest to hone our skills as parents. We must reclaim our traditional ways to raise our children as Inuit. Strong Inuit families lead to strong Inuit communities.”

Pausauraq Jana Harcharek, Director of Iñupiaq Education, North Slope Borough School District and Education Steering Committee Member

The centrality of parenting, and the roles of family and community as foundational for student success is depicted in Figure 1 (page 2). Strategy 6 provides a call to action to reclaim traditional parenting skills, such as modeling desired actions and skills as a way of teaching and, and a return to traditional subsistence activities that draw families together.

BACKGROUND FOR STRATEGY 6

Education Workshop delegates candidly noted a loss of parenting skills over the generations and a viewpoint that consistent discipline is not administered or supported by the community. Children need to be praised more for their accomplishments. Alcohol, drugs, and technology are troubling distractions that are getting in the way of effective parenting. Older and more experienced adults often do not feel empowered to advise young parents about parenting skills.

Workshop delegates took a macro view in proposing solutions directed at social structures and fostering the development of self-identity in order to create well-disciplined children.

Some suggested action items from the delegates included holding community meetings; finding people who want to become involved; finding parents who need help, and those who can help; teaching parenting skills in school; using social media to promote parenting skills (e.g. Facebook); having schools host “parent nights;” to hold community events focused on parenting; collectively taking responsibility for parenting; promoting awareness that social issues have led to a loss of parenting skills; enlisting the support and assistance of local agencies for promoting healthy parenting; considering the use of Migrant Education as a funding source for parenting activities; and infusing parenting skills into subsistence activities.

OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY 6

The objective of the parenting strategy is to increase knowledge of and practice collective responsibility for traditional parenting.

ACTION STEPS FOR STRATEGY 6

Suggested action steps for individuals and groups that might accomplish the Strategy 6 objectives include,

- Research, promote, and create awareness about ways to practice traditional parenting skills.
- Promote the development of parenting skills curriculum and its inclusion in the school's curricular offerings for students.
- Organize community events that promote and teach parenting skills.
- Model engagement in subsistence activities as a way to demonstrate traditional parenting skills, and encourage others to engage in subsistence activities that involve the whole family.
- Assume personal responsibility to teach parenting skills to young parents who need help as a way to positively impact the future of children.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Education reform and decolonization are long term processes that require parents to take back, or take on new responsibility for teaching and learning that is currently wielded by schools. Elders and others who are exemplars of traditional parenting will be key partners for achieving the intended outcome: An increased number of young parents expressing interest in and adopting traditional parenting methods, and participating actively in traditional family subsistence activities will increase.

A youth panel member, speaking of the strength and encouragement she received from her grandmother as she left home to attend college:

“My grandma is a really big factor in why I am where I am now. She called me all the time and said...home is always there. It is tough to leave home, especially when you have a big family. I am the first one to leave my family and my community and go away to school. It was very hard for me, especially at the beginning. And then my Grandma would remind me: Home is always there. Get your education and come back.”

-Youth Panel Member at the 2014 ICC-Alaska Education Workshop



Photo By Aviaja Lynge

This Strategy is based on the knowledge and concepts generated by the Inuit delegates, speakers and invited participants at the ICC-Alaska Education Workshop which was held in Nome, Alaska in April 2014. Thank you to all who have committed to the success of the Strategy and its implementation.



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