HOW-TO GUIDE

Engaging in Meaningful Tribal Consultation for Effective Teacher Retention and Recruitment

Tribal consultation can strengthen relationship-building opportunities and elevate Tribal populations' role in decision-making. This guide defines Tribal consultation and clarifies the motivations for engaging in the practice. It also outlines best practices for initiating and sustaining Tribal consultation. While the focus of this guide is on teacher retention and recruitment, the step-by-step process presented here can be used for all types of initiatives. The appendix includes detailed Alaska-specific and national resources for initiating and conducting Tribal consultation.

Motivation for Tribal Consultation

Alaska's P–12 education system has a unique history even among Indigenous communities in the United States. Schools in rural, Alaska Native communities, previously predominantly run by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), moved to local control in the 1970s through the Molly Hootch legal settlement.[1] The BIA ran schools with a colonial approach, suppressing Native culture and languages and causing intergenerational trauma that remains to this day. When Alaska's communities were able to organize and exert local control over schooling, the shift was significant—though it was not a perfect fix. Of Alaska's 53 current school districts formed under local control, over 60 percent are in rural areas and over 85 percent contain rural-remote schools.[2] Many of these rural schools serve over 90 percent Alaska Native student populations.

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) Title VI: Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education, certain federal education programs require meaningful consultation with Tribal entities. District leaders should understand how these requirements apply to their district's federal funding and program participation. More important than legal compliance is that schools belong to their communities, creating an inherent desire for local control over education. Local school districts and Tribal entities serve the same

[1] Read a brief history of this shift as shared by Alaska's Commissioner of Education during that time, Marshall Lind.

[2] As defined by Nation Center for Education Statistics from 2024–25.

populations of students. This means partnership and collaboration are required to ensure all students are served through the education system.

Tribal consultation can support school districts' teacher retention and recruitment efforts by offering historical and local perspectives, supporting pathways for local recruitment, identifying community experts, connecting to statewide or regional culture camps, and infusing lessons with place-based knowledge in and out of the classroom. Once Tribal entities and school districts build a strong working relationship, opportunities will grow to allow schools to serve communities beyond educating students during the school day. One example is positive community service. See Spotlight on the Bristol Bay Partnership: How to Build and Sustain a District Partnership for guidance on how to build these partnerships.

Tribal Consultation—What is it? What is it not?

Tribal consultation is a concerted effort to include Tribal entities in decision-making that affects students, families, and communities. Meaningful consultation:

- Engages partners from various Tribal entities on a consistent and defined basis
- Establishes and reiterates respect for all entities
- Aims for consensus-building across participants, with a shared understanding of how decisions will be made when full agreement is not possible
- Fosters active, respectful, and continuous conversation
- Ensures timely sharing of information with all partners informed prior to meetings
- Is an ongoing, reciprocal process

Tribal consulting is not:

- Asking for "review" and consent once a plan is developed, such as a final approval, acknowledgement signature, or check box
- Informing Tribal entities of decisions after they are final
- Lacking timely follow up after joint meetings
- Achieved at a single meeting

Consultation with Tribal Entities—Step-by-Step

Tribal consultation can lead to deeper partnerships on specific projects, including teacher retention, teacher recruitment, pathways for local educators, youth-school engagement and achievement, and onboarding with Department of Education and Early Development as a teacher apprenticeship program sponsor. This consultation is a critical starting point for interaction with Tribal entities when serving Alaska Native and American Indian (AN/AI) students.

If your school district is not currently engaging in Tribal consultation regularly, now is the time to begin. This activity may feel overwhelming or intimidating to school district leaders at first. Several guides on Tribal consultation exist, many of which are state specific (see the appendix for tools, state examples, and Alaska-specific resources). These guides tend to feature a set of agreed-upon norms. The steps below walk through the consultation process using teacher retention and recruitment as an example and show how those norms are put into practice at each stage.

NORMS FOR TRIBAL CONSULTATION

- **Know the history**
- **Recognize the federal obligation**
- **Agree upon the definition**
- **Strive for consensus-based decision making through respect, information sharing, and commitment**

1. **Recognize that P–12 schools have a federal obligation to engage in regular, consistent, and cyclical Tribal consultation under Title VI.[3]**
    - Districts should connect with Tribal entities based on the ESSA Title VI requirements. If you are new to your position, investigate how your district has already engaged in Tribal consultation to inform your next steps.
    - Tribal entities have the right to request that districts prioritize Tribal consultation if they have not done so. This is especially critical for teacher retention and recruitment. Tribal governments must have input on improving pathways for recruiting and growing Native educators; designing and implementing teacher training and professional development that integrates Indigenous culture, languages, and heritage; and understanding and addressing the root causes of teacher shortages and turnover in Native communities.
2. **Ensure the right participants are in the room.**
    - While consultation should generally begin with the federally recognized Tribal governments that represent students and communities in the district, districts may also engage regional nonprofit organizations, Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA) corporations, and other Alaska Native organizations (such as Alaska Federation of Natives and First Alaskans Institute) as partners and resource providers as appropriate. A list of sovereign Tribes, federally recognized Tribes, and village corporations may also help in determining who to contact. Each Tribal entity operates at different (and sometimes multiple) levels—state, regional, and local.

See an example of a regional nonprofit supporting districts in this brief: Spotlight on the Tanana Chiefs Conference: How the Tanana Chiefs Conference is Advancing Teacher Retention in Interior Alaska.

[3] Read Title VI federal regulations: https://www.everystudentsucceedsact.org/title-vi-

- Districts need to understand which Tribal entities represent local students, as there may be several. It is okay to start with just one Tribal entity, but district leaders should be respectful of Tribal decisions to include others even if it is earlier than anticipated. For example, compared to larger regional Tribal entities, local federally recognized Tribes may have more interest in local educators, knowledge of existing or retired Alaska Native educators, and connection to community schools.
- Understanding your district's ultimate goals when doing meaningful consultation will guide which entities may be the most appropriate to engage with initially.

3. **Know the history of education from an AN/AI perspective at multiple levels—Tribal, statewide, regional, and local.**
    - All educators should have completed three semester hours of approved Alaska Studies coursework and three semester hours of approved Alaska Multicultural coursework. These are just the foundation—more knowledge and local understanding should be acquired to build respectful connections. For example, district staff members should have proper background knowledge concerning Alaska Native education in the region including colonization, the trauma of schools separating culture and language from the people, boarding school atrocities,[4] and the transformative Molly Hootch settlement. Furthermore, they should learn and engage in the transformative practices of integrating Alaska Native ways of knowing, connecting to community members to enhance placed-based learning, and tapping into their students' knowledge to ensure their classrooms are culturally infused.
    - District leaders should be sure to supplement this information, if necessary, with local background knowledge through existing resources or conversations with leaders from Tribal governments or regional nonprofit associations.

4. **Proactively engage in conversations with local Tribal entities to jointly determine the process. Districts can use a variety of strategies to ensure local Tribal entities are full collaborators in the process:**
    - Consider selecting a specific upcoming or proposed project to use as the first topic of conversation, such as teacher retention and recruitment.
    - Be sure to share a draft agenda with all invitees at least one day (or a mutually agreed upon amount of days) before the meeting, including information about the initial project and an invitation to add to the agenda.
    - Teacher retention and recruitment efforts are a great topic for Tribal consultation.

[4] Department of the Interior Releases Investigative Report, Outlines Next Steps in Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative

Tribal consultation could serve as a strong foundation for addressing teacher retention and recruitment concerns in the district. Check out these two resources: How-To Guide: Assessing Needs and Capacities to Inform Teacher Retention & Recruitment Efforts and How-To Guide: Creating a Teacher Retention & Recruitment Action Team to integrate efforts and support conversations.

5. **Build consensus on the definition of Tribal consultation among all partners.**
    - At the initial meeting, be sure to include time to discuss the definition of meaningful Tribal consultation and come to consensus on understanding. The "What is it? What is it not?" section of this guide may be a helpful resource for this discussion. Don't rush this step—it may take time.
    - Include the shared definition in each agenda to ground each meeting with a reminder.
    - Use this process as a model when needed to build consensus on other topics, such as what it means to strengthen teacher working conditions to enhance educator retention in the district.
6. **Strive for collaborative and shared decision making through foundational norms of respect, information sharing, and commitment on the part of all participants.**
    - Listen to all perspectives and be sure to provide time and space for each participant to share when comfortable.
    - Be sure to document the conversation and decisions. Share these notes and follow through in a timely fashion with any items needed afterwards.
    - Recognize that Tribal protocols are just as valuable as protocols established within the school district.
    - School districts and Tribal entities can access existing guides and tools and can also create their own tools to support conversations, feedback, and ongoing collaboration via in-person and online meetings and in writing. See appendix A for a list of tools and resources to get started.
7. **Agree on a schedule (for example, quarterly, monthly, or aligned to key planning cycles) and document action items, decisions, responsible parties, and timelines after each meeting.**
    - Establish a meeting schedule before closing the initial meeting. Stick with your schedule to demonstrate your commitment to Tribal consultation.
    - Provide avenues for feedback, continuous involvement, and shared decision-making by reviewing projects, plans, and funding opportunities at regular meetings.
    - Regular contact builds familiarity, trust, and lasting partnerships.

Conclusion

Tribal consultation is more than a suggestion—it is a legal obligation. More importantly, it is a critical part of supporting Alaska Native students in their communities. Use this guide and the linked resources to work toward meaningful Tribal consultation. Your district will gain partners who can extend the community's capacity to support all students through the education system. Through this process of building mutual respect, aligning goals for the community and its children, and collaboration, districts and Tribal entities will collectively build goodwill for continued work together to benefit students, communities, and Alaska as a whole.

Appendix A. Resources for Tribal Consultation in Alaska

TRIBAL CONSULTATION TOOLS AND STATE EXAMPLES

- NIEA Consultation Guides
- Oregon Department of Education's A Toolkit for Tribal Consultation
- New Mexico Public Education Department's Tribal Consultation: Definition and Best Practices
- Oklahoma State Department of Education's Tribal Consultation Guide

ALASKA-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Tribes and Members

- Alaska Federation of Natives
- Alaska Federation of Natives, Alaska Native Education
- Alaska Federation of Natives, Regional Organizations
- Working Effectively with Alaska Native Tribes and Organizations, A Desk Guide
- Federal Register, Vol. 91, No. 20, Friday, January 30, 2026, Notices: Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian entities recognized by and eligible to receive services from the U.S. BIA
- State of Alaska Geoportal, Federally Recognized Tribes, Open Data, Department of Commerce, Community, & Economic Development
- National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Tribal Directory
- ANCSA Regional Association, The Twelve Regions
- ANCSA Regional Association, Overview of Entities Operating in the Twelve Regions
- First Alaskans

Tribal Compacting

- State-Tribal Education Compacting
- Association of Alaska School Boards, What is Tribal Compacting of Education? Commentary Article
- Signed Resolution on Alaska Native Tribal Education Consortium (ANTEC)

Education Standards and Guidelines

- Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools
- Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Guidelines for Culturally Responsive School Boards
- Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge
- Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers
- Sealaska Heritage Institute, Alaska Native Language Arts K–3 Reading Standards (Sept. 16, 2024)

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