



**EDUCATION
& EARLY DEVELOPMENT**

FINAL REPORT

Assessment Outreach Project:

**IDENTIFYING
CONNECTIONS AND
OPPORTUNITIES WITH
ENTITIES SERVING
ALASKA NATIVE
STUDENTS**

DECEMBER 2023

Department of Education and Early Development

ASSESSMENT OUTREACH PROJECT



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final report summarizes the results of the Assessment Outreach Project and outlines several considerations for moving forward. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) partnered with Denali Daniels + Associates to conduct a series of discussions and information gathering activities to better understand the assessment needs of entities serving Alaska Native students. The report contains an overview of the activities conducted under the Assessment Outreach Project, which included an issue paper, a series of discussion groups, and an online survey.

The analysis and results of this report will help DEED, school leaders and other decision-makers understand how Alaskans view school assessments. A summary of the considerations is provided below, with the full versions including supporting quotes, found at the end of this document.

- **Value and Types of Assessments:** The purpose and usefulness of assessments for teachers, administrators, and policy makers is understood, but there are concerns about the “one-size-fits-all” aspect of assessments.
- **Equity of Assessments:** Finding ways to emphasize the importance of assessments as a path toward improving equity could assist in addressing the issues that arose around fairness.
- **Timeliness and Usefulness:** If educators could see the results of the assessments in a reasonable amount of time, they could use the information to modify or adapt their curriculum according to student needs.
- **Cultural Sensitivity; Respect for Indigenous Cultures and Lifestyles:** For assessments to be culturally responsive, especially in Alaska, they should resonate with the students' lived experiences, involve the community, and consider diverse ways of knowing and learning.
- **Inclusion of Indigenous and Local Content:** Seek out opportunities to connect with local life experiences that are relevant to the region/community where they live, especially Alaska Native and rural communities across the state. Engaging community members in the development of content, especially elders, is a way to align assessments with Alaska Native needs and values.

- **Language and Communication:** To make assessments more relevant, ensure the wording and context is culturally appropriate. There is also an interest in considering oral answers and weaving in oral traditions to the assessments.
- **Assessment Methodology:** Explore the possibility of offering varied assessment styles, such as projects and performance tasks, to align assessments with Alaska Native student needs. Other ideas included more verbal interactions, hands-on assessments, group assessments, and visual assessments.
- **Stress and Pressure Management:** Consider ways to make assessments supportive, not stressful. Creating a positive and encouraging environment during assessments is especially important for those children with developmental and learning disabilities.
- **Technology and Accessibility:** Those who are planning and conducting the assessments in rural Alaskan communities should consider the technology needs to ensure equitable access. It's important to ensure every student can access and understand the materials.
- **Increase Awareness about the Importance of Assessment Results:** Consider ways to further involve parents, educators, and the community in understanding and communicating the results of assessments and how these results could be utilized.

The result of the activities conducted under this project are the considerations listed above and in more detail at the end of this report. The overarching theme that remained consistent throughout the project was clear: for a truly valuable educational experience for all students, including Alaska Native students, assessments must be relevant, inclusive, diverse, and culturally respectful. This theme aligns with DEED's stated mission: An excellent education for every student every day.

PROJECT TIMELINE



II. INTRODUCTION

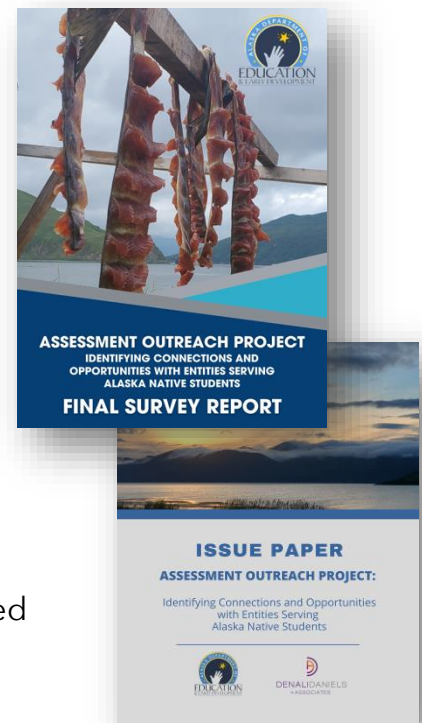
Project Overview

This final report summarizes the results of the Assessment Outreach Project and concludes with a series of considerations for moving forward. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) partnered with Denali Daniels + Associates to conduct a series of discussions and information gathering activities to better understand the assessment needs of entities serving Alaska Native students. The report contains an overview of the activities conducted under the Assessment Outreach Project, which included:

- **ISSUE PAPER:** The issue paper was developed to provide an overview of Alaska's balanced assessment system and to explore ways assessments could benefit entities serving Alaska Native Students.
- **LANDING PAGE:** A project landing page was created as a way to share information and provide a resource for seeking additional info about the project. The Issue Paper and project flyer were posted there and it was also used as a signup portal for the focus groups and surveys.

[\(VISIT LANDING PAGE\)](#)

- **DISCUSSION GROUPS:** In May 2023, a series of four group discussions and two follow-up sessions were hosted to seek input from parents, educators, and community members to better understand the assessment needs of entities serving Alaska Native students.
- **ONLINE SURVEY:** A survey was developed based on input and feedback from the discussion groups with the aim of better understanding how different audiences, including parents, educators, and interested community members, viewed school assessments.



III. ISSUE PAPER

Project Goals and Purpose of Issue Paper

This issue paper was developed and made available to the public online to:

- Provide an overview of Alaska's Balanced Assessment System.
- Describe the entities serving Alaska Native Students in education.
- Explore ways assessments could benefit entities serving Alaska Native Students.
- Provide background information about assessments in Alaska and how partners could use data and results to meet their education goals.
- Consider expanding how American Indian/Alaska Native students participate in the National Indian Education Study (NIES) to include survey questionnaires that shed light on their cultural experiences at school.

Alaska's Balanced Assessment System

DEED provides statewide assessments for a few specific reasons:

- **INFORM** - First, to be able to inform families, educators, policy makers, the community, and businesses how our schools and districts are performing.
- **IDENTIFY NEED** - Second, after determining how schools are performing, identify schools in the most need of school improvement efforts.
- **ENSURE EQUITY** - Third, to ensure there is equity in education for students across Alaska. The mission is to provide an excellent education to every student every day.

Conclusion:

In summary, Alaska implements statewide assessments for students through the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). School districts in Alaska administer various assessments in schools and classrooms throughout the school year. Effective assessment is the bridge between teaching the standards and ensuring that support is available for all students.

IV. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Community Engagement for the Assessment Outreach Project

In May 2023, a series of four group discussions and two follow-up sessions were hosted to seek input from parents, educators, and community members to better understand the assessment needs of entities serving Alaska Native students. Following analysis of input from the discussion groups, an online survey was developed to reach a broader audience and gather more input on assessment needs and awareness. A final analysis of the input received from the community engagement process is provided in this section, with themes and supporting quotes highlighted in each topic area.



Community Engagement Methodology

DISCUSSION GROUPS: Community engagement and recruitment for the discussion groups was conducted through a targeted outreach strategy.

- To sign up for the virtual groups, a link was posted on the [Assessment Outreach Project landing page](#).
- During the Alaska Native Language Summit on April 27, 2023, project representatives presented briefly on the project and sought participation from the attendees.
- Flyers were created for distribution and sharing, with a QR code with the link to sign up for the discussion groups.
- DEED included focus group information in various email newsletters, including the Assessment weekly email and the Alaska Native Education list serv.

- Email blasts were sent to a Language Summit participant email list, and some targeted emails were sent to parents who previously volunteered to be considered for focus group participation.

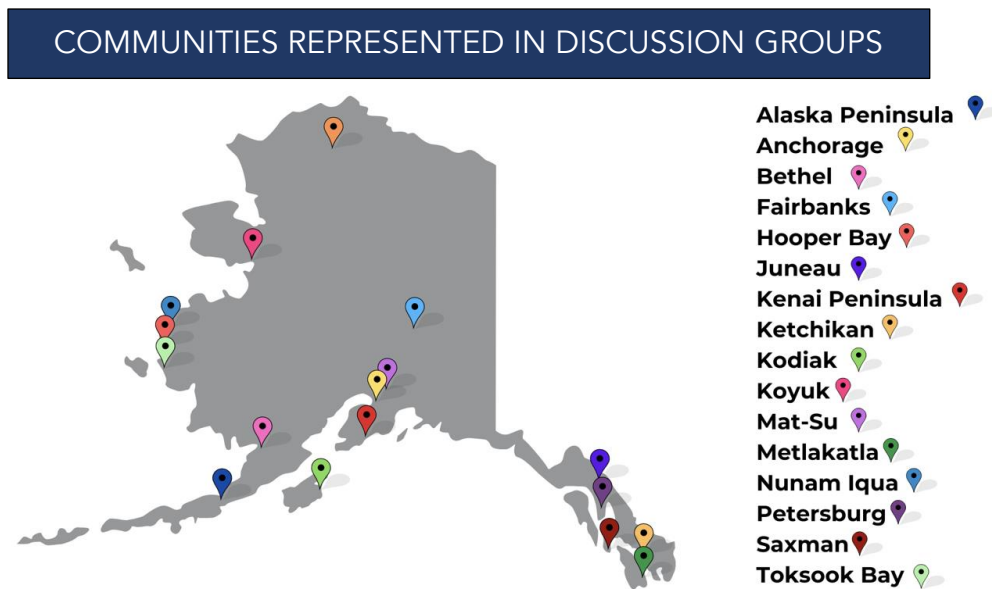
ONLINE SURVEY: The online survey was conducted using a convenience sample and was promoted through a variety of methods.

- The project website served as a portal to access the survey and the link to survey was posted on the landing page. A QR code was created to make access to the survey as easy as possible.
- To promote the survey email blasts were sent out to the project mailing list, which includes Tribal partners, parents, and educators.
- DEED staff promoted the survey during various meetings and conferences and sent out emails to their network of collaborators.
- The answers were collected through an online portal, making it easy for people to take part at a time that suited them.



V. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION GROUPS

In total there were 47 participants across all 6 groups from communities across Alaska. Two groups included parents and two groups included educators. Participants were asked open ended questions about their familiarity with assessments, the value of assessments, cultural responsiveness, barriers and improving awareness. Brief summaries of the discussions are included below.



PURPOSE AND FAMILIARITY WITH ALASKA'S ASSESSMENTS: Participants in both groups (educators and parents) were asked about their perceptions of the purpose of assessments and their familiarity with assessments conducted by DEED. First the discussion focused on the purpose of assessments in general, and then they were asked about specifically named assessments and their level of awareness.

- The parent groups were knowledgeable about the reasons for conducting student assessments and understood why these results would be valuable.
- However, in general the parent groups were unaware of the named assessments and had little knowledge of them by name.
- As expected, the educator groups were more aware of the purposes of assessments and were much more familiar with the specific assessments conducted in Alaska.
- Several educators demonstrated their knowledge about the types of assessments (summative, formative, standardized).

- In general, educators were familiar with most assessments and parents and community members were less familiar with Alaska's assessments.

VALUE OF ASSESSMENTS: This discussion focused on the perceived value of assessments by parents and educators. In all groups the responses were varied and even contradictory at times.

- The value of assessments for individual students to measure progress was questioned several times by parents and educators.
- While many understood the purpose and usefulness of assessments for the administrators and policy makers, there were concerns about the "one-size-fits-all" aspect of assessments and the effects on students.
- There was also concern about the inability of assessments to gauge the skills and knowledge of students comprehensively and accurately.
- While there were concerns raised about the value, the discussions also demonstrated that there is perceived value in assessments, while there are also perceptions that limitations exist with Alaska's assessments with participants noting opt-in/opt-out as a limitation and the delay in seeing the results.

"They don't always accurately reflect a student's knowledge or skills... And they don't really tell you the full range of a student's abilities just by these test results... there is a lot of research that show that socioeconomic status, culture, language, all of these things can bias like these assessments are biased against them. And so, it won't really give you accurate data."

Alaskan Educator

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE: Participants were asked if they could think of ways that assessments could be more culturally responsive.

- The discussions highlighted how cultural responsiveness had several different meanings and pertained both to the content contained in assessments, as well as the method of delivery and the student's environment during the assessment.
- There were recommendations from participants that the assessments should be more individualized and more relevant or reflective of the student's background.
- There was also discussion around the delivery of the assessments, and ideas about ways the assessments are given could be improved.

- These involved logistical considerations like time and technology, as well as considerations around language and the types of skills being measured.
- A general theme that emerged when asking about cultural responsiveness was that the assessments could improve in “meeting people where they are at.”

“An old teacher friend of mine tells a story about being off in the interior with a small one room class with a bunch of students of varying ages in a village. And she opens up the curriculum box and pulls out the grade appropriate stuff and has a crossword puzzle. First challenge is a three-letter word beginning with C. And the clue is where does milk come from. And all the students in the class wrote down can. And by the rules of what was offered there, they were not wrong. But they couldn't show their skill. And it just so succinctly demonstrates to me the issue, every single one of those kids spoke multiple languages, by any other assessment, they were very capable and more capable than the average. But they couldn't demonstrate it.”

Alaskan Educator and Parent

OTHER BARRIERS: During the group discussions, there were several other themes that emerged related to the successful implementation of assessments and the student experience.

- Most noteworthy were the number of comments about students feeling anxiety and even physical illness because of school assessments.
- Parents and educators also relayed stories demonstrating how challenging it is for students who don't have a western education or the necessary context to understand questions being asked on standardized assessments, and they are therefore at a significant disadvantage.

IMPROVING AWARENESS ABOUT ASSESSMENTS: Both parents and educators in the discussion groups suggested that clearer communications from the schools or the leadership about assessments would be helpful and made several suggestions.

- Parents indicated that they rarely received information on when assessments were taking place, and that the purpose of the assessments was not communicated either ahead of time or following the assessment period.

- Recommendations included improving communications with parents, teachers, tribal leaders, village elders, and others in the community, as well as sharing the data collected during the assessments to make it more relevant to students.
- Following up with the communities and providing more information on how the data was used was also mentioned.
- Flyers were talked about as a good way to get the parents information; many answered that they read flyers and anything they knew about assessments came from info sent home.

Conclusion:

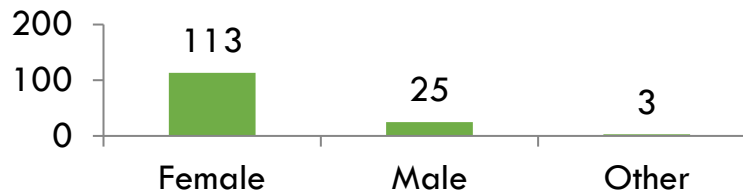
The community engagement and outreach conducted during this project was designed to collect input and feedback on the awareness, value, cultural responsiveness, and methods of communication. The feedback from these discussion groups then shaped the content and development of the online public survey, which was the next activity conducted under this project.

VI. SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

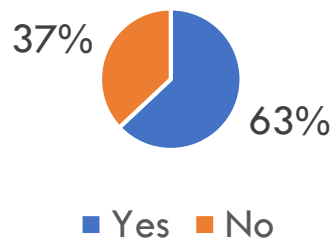
Survey Demographics:

Below are graphic representations of the demographics reported by survey respondents including gender, parental status, educator status, race, and geographic location. In total, there were 159 full responses and six partial responses, for an overall total of 165 respondents.

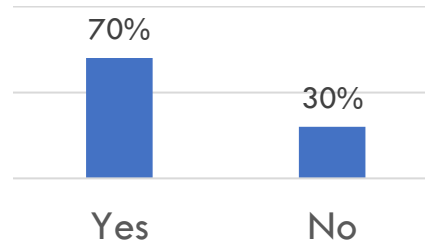
GENDER



ARE YOU A PARENT?

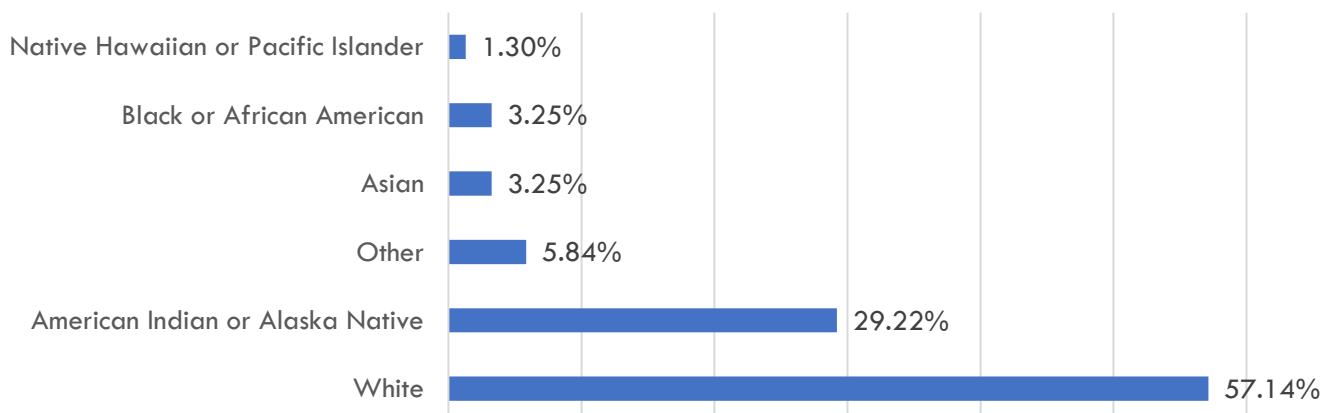


ARE YOU AN EDUCATOR?

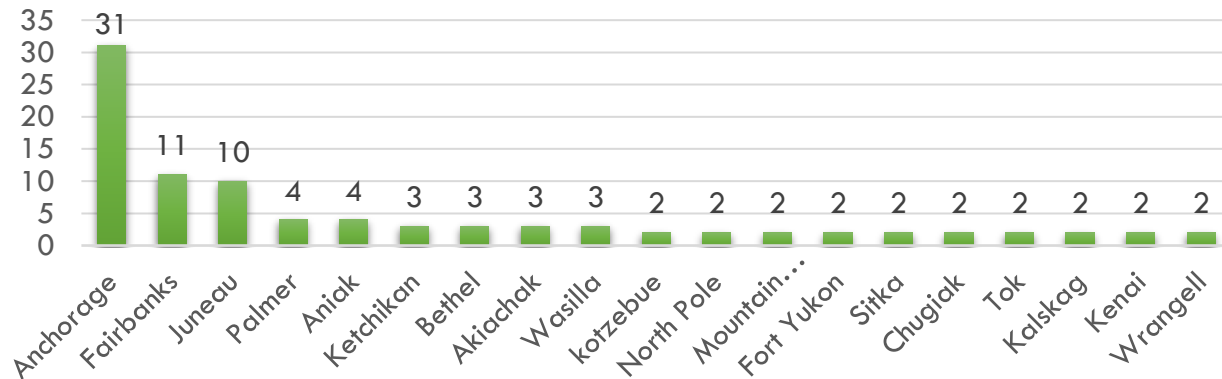


40% of respondents answered that they are both parents and educators.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH?

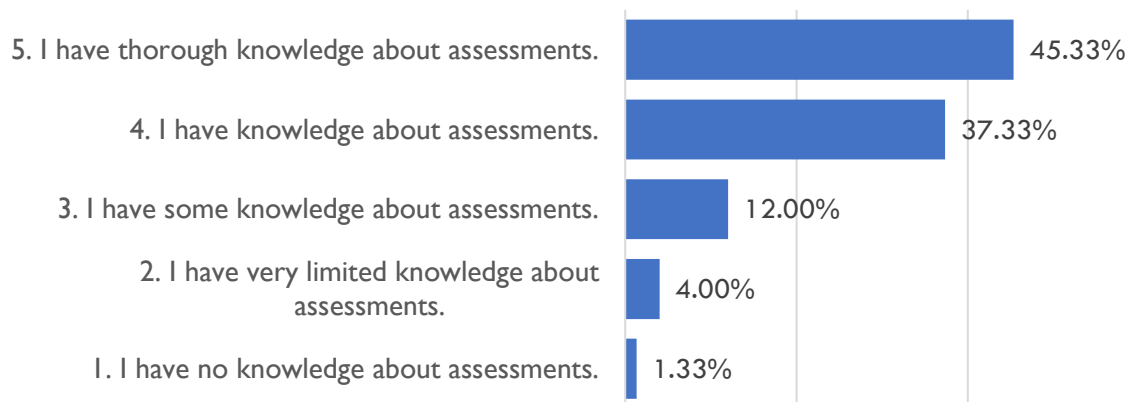


WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

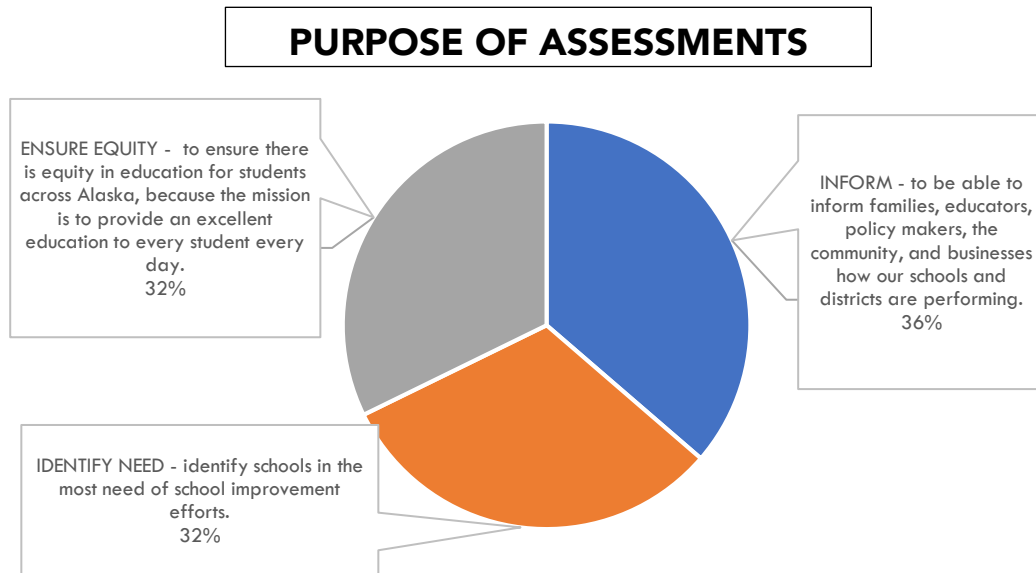


Thematic and Narrative Analysis

KNOWLEDGE OF ASSESSMENTS: The survey sought to measure the level of perceived knowledge respondents felt they had about school assessments. General knowledge was measured in the question: “Which of the following statements best describes your knowledge of K12 assessments in Alaska?”



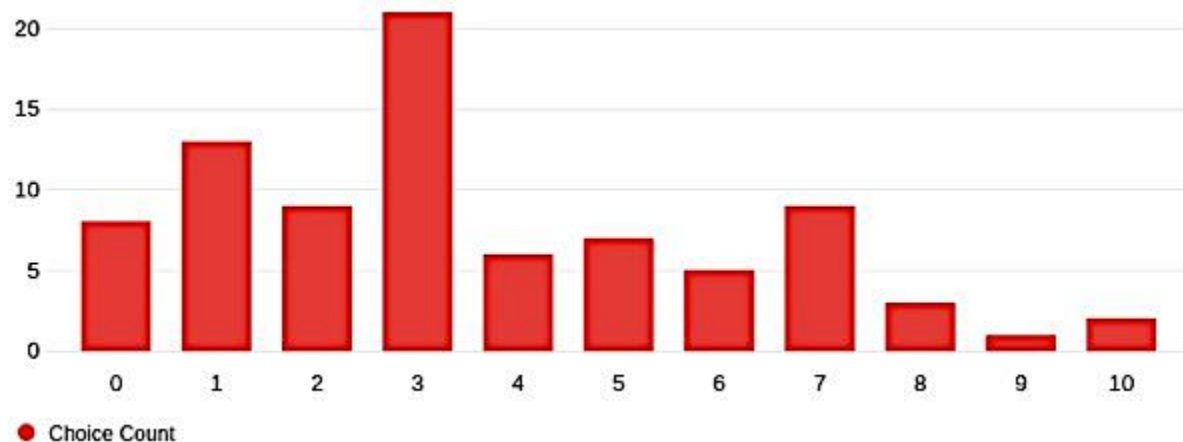
PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENTS: Respondents were asked several questions about their understandings of the purpose of assessments. In one question they were given three options and could pick all that applied. The question was “Which of these reasons do you see as important for using assessments?”



Respondents were then asked to further comment on the purpose of assessments in an open-ended question. In a review of the open-ended responses, a few high-level themes emerged. In general, while assessments are viewed as essential tools to identify student needs and adapt instruction accordingly, there are significant concerns regarding their ability to ensure equity, their cultural appropriateness, and their limitations in providing a comprehensive view of student learning. Below is a summary of the major issues and concerns expressed by the survey respondents.

- **Equity Concerns:** Many respondents expressed concerns about the equity of the current assessment systems.
- **Limitations of Assessments:** Several participants felt that assessments don't paint a full picture and are limited in their scope.
- **Timeliness and Usefulness:** A common theme was the timeliness of the results and their utility. If educators don't get the results and the analysis back in a timely fashion, they can't use the insights gathered to modify or adapt their curriculum.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Some respondents voiced concerns about the cultural appropriateness of assessments. They pointed out scenarios like students not understanding certain concepts due to cultural differences, such as traffic jams or escalators.

ALIGNMENT WITH ALASKA NATIVE STUDENT NEEDS: A set of questions focused on alignment with Alaska Native needs and values. Respondents were first asked “On a scale of 1-10, where 1 = Not at all aligned with the needs of Alaska Native students, and 10 = Very aligned with the needs of Alaska Native students: How would you rate the cultural responsiveness of Alaska’s assessments?”



The results show that current perceptions of alignment with Alaska Native student needs rated low on this question. An open-ended follow-up question was asked about what could be done to make assessments more culturally responsive in both the way they are administered and the content they contain. The responses varied in length and tone, however several themes emerged from the answers provided and are summarized below:

- **Inclusion of Indigenous and Local Content** - Emphasize the importance of including local and Indigenous content, when possible, in assessments. Adjust the content to reflect lived experiences, stories, and rural Alaskan history.
- **Community and Elder Involvement** - Engage community members in the development of content, especially with elders, is a way to improve and better align assessments. A number of responses said it is crucial to let indigenous Alaskans play a role in decision-making around assessments.
- **Language and Communication** - There is an interest in local languages, and to ensure the wording is culturally appropriate for assessments. There were also multiple survey responses advocating for accepting oral answers and weaving in oral traditions to the assessments.
- **Respect for Indigenous Cultures and Lifestyles** - Assessment schedules should align with traditional activities like subsistence hunting and fishing.

Respondents said that incorporating these local needs would show respect for local customs and practices and align with the important periods for indigenous Alaskans.

- **Assessment Methodology** - Students should be able to find ways to showcase skills through other types of activities, instead of through a routine timed assessment. Offering varied assessment styles, such as performance tasks, oral responses, and collaborative projects was suggested by several respondents in order to better align assessments with their needs.
- **Holistic and Individual Approaches** - Several survey responses mentioned that assessments should capture a broad view of a student's skills and learning and be more holistic in general.
- **Stress and Pressure Management** - Assessments should be supportive, not stressful. Creating a positive and encouraging environment during assessments is especially important for those children with developmental and learning disabilities.
- **Culturally Knowledgeable Educators** - Educators should be well-informed about Indigenous cultures. Those handling the assessments must be culturally sensitive and knowledgeable.
- **Technology and Accessibility** - Those who are planning and conducting the assessments in rural Alaskan communities should think ahead about technology and how accessible it is. It's important to ensure every student can access and understand the materials.
- **Real-world Relevance:** Content should be more relevant to the students' life experiences, drawing from their community, traditions, and values. Many respondents stressed the importance of making assessments culturally relevant, especially for students from Alaskan villages. They mentioned the disconnect between urban references (such as stop lights) and village life.

GETTING INFORMATION ABOUT ASSESSMENTS: To better inform parents, caregivers, educators and the community about assessments, DEED asked respondents where they heard about assessments. The responses show that information about assessments comes from everywhere, but the communication around assessments is primarily through the school. To help DEED better inform about assessments, the survey asked, "If you could pick one way to increase awareness about the importance of assessments and how they can benefit Alaska Native students in Alaska, what would it be?"

- **Direct Communication with Parents & Community:** There was a strong emphasis on the need to directly communicate with parents and local Alaska Native leaders. Many respondents stressed the importance of involving the community and parents in understanding the results.
- **Equity and the True Purpose of Assessments:** Emphasizing the importance of assessments in ensuring equity and the role that the results can play in how policy makers decide where funding goes.
- **Workshops, Events, and Community Engagement:** Holding events in the community, workshops for parents, and informational meetings were frequently mentioned as effective strategies.

VII. ASSESSMENT ADVISORY PANEL

Assessment Advisory Panel participants were encouraged to respond to the survey online as part of the parent/educator community, and they also had the opportunity to discuss the topics in groups at their fall meeting. The results are summarized in the tables below.

How would you rate the cultural responsiveness of Alaska's assessments (i.e., how well do the assessments align the needs of Alaska Native students)?

The issue of culturally relevant materials is not properly dealt with. Students still come across issues, vocabulary, or examples which they can't relate to, which affect their comprehension, and scores.

Issue is for cultural responsiveness, the issue of screening using mClass for screening English in a full immersion school where students are learning Yupik as their first language. We have changed the way that we are measuring the needs of our students as well as the measures screening etc. For example, kindergarten the issue with teacher retention in rural schools has disrupted student's education, which is reflected in the test scores.

Our assessments will never be truly culturally responsive if our content standards are not culturally responsive. What are we identifying as the types of learning that we 'value'? How do we balance competing priorities of preparing students for success in western post-secondary life while still honoring traditional ways of knowing? Are our assessments really just a measure of how colonized people are?

Can you think of ways that assessments could be more culturally responsive, both in the way they are administered as well as the content they contain?

One way to think about culturally responsive assessment is to consider the syntax. What kind of support do students have within the text to determine the meaning of unknown words?

If the standards don't have anything to do with Alaska Native Values, then it would be hard to make a connection to what is being tested for students. If the test items don't

contain scenarios in the test items that reflect the communities that students live, then is their bias.

If you could pick one way to increase awareness about the importance of assessments and how they can benefit Alaska Native students in Alaska, what would it be?

When reviewing student goals and growth, the teacher could meet with the child and guardians to celebrate growth and communicate needs. In addition, the grandparents or special adults in the family could be invited.

Idea. During the instruction portion of the test, when the teachers are reading out the instructions, there could be a sentence or two about why the test is important.

VIII. CONSIDERATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Summary of Project Results:

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development's Assessment Outreach Project conducted a series of outreach activities to better understand the assessment needs of entities serving Alaska Native students. The information gathered during the discussions and through the survey was used to conduct an overall thematic analysis. From this analysis of the community engagement process, a set of considerations have been developed to guide the project moving forward. The primary themes are supported here by quotes from the survey, discussion groups, and input from the Assessment Advisory Panel.



Value and Types of Assessments: There were diverging opinions about the value of assessments for individual students to measure progress by both parents and educators. The purpose and usefulness of assessments for teachers, administrators, and policy makers is understood, but there are concerns about the “one-size-fits-all” aspect of assessments. A further perception was a concern about the inability of assessments to gauge the skills and knowledge of students comprehensively and accurately, particularly Alaska Native students, who were taught in a different style and whose learning was very much environmentally specific.

- *"I think that's some of the value of seeing where students are at. And understanding that it's a snapshot, it's not the whole picture."*
- *"They can be useful, I believe. But to be really good they have to be used in conjunction with other sorts of measures of student achievement."*
- *"The data is super subjective, because you're not getting each individual student, you're not analyzing the strengths and weaknesses. You're taking a test and assessment that is blanketed for everybody and applying a one size fits all, to a situation where it's not one size fits all."*
- *"Tests are one, very small and limited way to measure learning" and "assessments only show a portion of the full picture."*

Equity of Assessments: Finding ways to emphasize the importance of assessments as a path toward improving equity could assist in addressing the issues that arose around equity and fairness.

- *"these assessments are biased and based on a Western Education system"*
- *"ensuring equity is paramount; I do not think they are equitable"*
- *When conducting assessments, its important to "equitably allocate resources to ensure students have the opportunity for success."*
- *"Highlighting the fact that students can only BENEFIT from taking the test because it is used to ensure equity might get people to listen."*

Timeliness and Usefulness: If educators could see the results of the assessments in a reasonable amount of time, they could use the information to modify or adapt their curriculum according to student needs.

- *"Most assessments don't provide feedback in a timely enough manner to impact the student."*
- *"While I think assessments are important, I also believe that they should have a purpose and inform instruction and the student should be able to reflect on their assessments. These big assessments do not allow for these things."*

Cultural Sensitivity; Respect for Indigenous Cultures and Lifestyles: In the discussions and responses, many voiced concerns about the cultural appropriateness of assessments. They pointed out scenarios like students not understanding certain concepts due to cultural differences, such as traffic jams or escalators. In general, for assessments to be truly culturally responsive, especially in Alaska, they need to

resonate with the students' lived experiences, involve the community, and consider diverse ways of knowing and learning. Another consideration is that assessment schedules should align with traditional activities like subsistence hunting and fishing. Incorporating these local needs would show respect for local customs and practices and align with the important periods for indigenous Alaskans.

- *"By accommodating our subsistence periods, you show respect for our way of life."*
- *"Familiarize yourself with the cultural backgrounds of the children you will be testing. This includes their languages, customs, and beliefs. You can gather this information through direct communication with the child or their family, or through cultural resources like books or websites."*
- *"...[do] these assessments including all the different aspects, traditional demographics, location, different languages, that they speak within the community that they're administering...?"*
- *"Understanding and valuing our customs is key to fair and effective assessment."*
- *"A community should be able to adjust the assessment for their cultural needs. As long as it still measures the same objective. In the end, it all comes down to the standard that everyone is teaching to... there should be the ability to amend or adjust the assessments to match those cultural needs rather than just a cookie cutter."*
- *"Kids in villages don't understand the relationship to [things like] stop lights and heavy equipment. Have to use references related to village life not city life."*
- *"A native student from a village will not know words like 'curb' but, will know other culturally relevant vocabulary..."*
- *"The language used, native students in a village don't identify with school busses, going to the mall etc. So, you can't use that type of language."*
- *"The way assessments are done is fairly western, and even for nonindigenous students can be difficult. I think going forward it would be important to see how things are done for learning in an indigenous fashion, and to have multiple advisors to guide the process of creating culturally relevant assessments."*

Inclusion of Indigenous and Local Content: Throughout the project, themes emerged about the importance of including local and Indigenous content, when possible, in assessments. This could include having questions and scenarios that connect with local life experiences and that are relevant to the region/community where they live, especially Alaska Native and rural communities in Alaska. Engaging

community members in the development of content, especially Elders, is a way to improve and better align assessments with Alaska Native needs and values.

- *"Incorporating our local culture and traditions into assessments is not just important—it's essential for a true representation of our community's knowledge and values."*
- *"The measures that are expected to be common knowledge usually are so off base, had nothing to do with the environment I lived in when I was growing up. And it's expected to set the context not, be the thing we're testing on."*
- *"Having the context of the questions reflect the environment and values of our students would eliminate huge barriers."*
- *"The voice of the community, especially our elders, should be at the forefront of content development."*
- *"The children were tested on what they did not see around the environment, like a fireman or fire truck. We don't see that in the villages. And here, at the high school, it seemed to be the same thing, where the vocabularies are high, higher than what they know."*
- *"Decisions about assessments should be made WITH us, not FOR us."*
- *"Our elders have wisdom that's often overlooked. Their involvement can make assessments more relevant and meaningful."*
- *"Ask the native communities to come together to create assessments based on tradition and non-colonial foundations."*
- *"Yes, most importantly, center them around the input of Alaska Native elders, educators, and parents. Alaska Native interests need to be invited and compensated to give verbal input."*
- *"Something I have noticed about Alaska Native culture is the significant increase with engagement when students are working with elders and people whom they know well and trust."*

Language and Communication – To make assessments more relevant, ensure the wording is culturally appropriate. Some also advocated for accepting oral answers and weaving in oral traditions to the assessments.

- *"Oral traditions are our legacy. Incorporating them into assessments would be a true representation of our culture."*
- *"Assessments should have language consideration that are applicable to rural Alaskan students."*

- *"The speaking cadence of people differs in different regions. Comprehension is extremely important not just fluency."*
- *"Every village is different, the tradition and cultures we have. Using easier words so the majority of the students will understand. Be more concrete on what they see around their environment."*
- *"Not everything can be captured in written words. Oral responses add depth and context."*
- *"I find some of the assessments aren't tailored towards students in Alaska. And so, there's a lot of confusion there with the language and vocabulary that's used in these assessments."*
- *"An additional barrier where the English most of our Alaska Native students does not meet 'proficient English' standards, so it also gets in the way of seeing how well our students understand the academic content."*

Assessment Methodology - Students should be able to find ways to showcase skills through other types of activities, instead of through a routine question and answer assessment. A more holistic view of assessments and demonstrating abilities could be more in line with Alaska Native student needs. Consider moving away from timed and multiple-choice formats to include oral responses, collaborative projects, and performance assessments. Offering varied assessment styles, like projects and performance tasks, could be considered in order to better align assessments with their needs. Other ideas included more verbal interactions, hands-on assessments, group assessments, and visual assessments.

- *"I don't always feel assessments should just be tests. If students were able to apply what they learn in identifying and problem-solving within their state, country, and/or world it could be a better way to see the learning."*
- *"Tests should be more practical in nature. Demonstrate the skills through a task, rather than by answering questions."*
- *"Our kids need more processing time, the assessments do not reflect teaching practices and instruction in the classroom, lack of representation in prompts, our people typically do not demonstrate learning/proficiency on a computer-demonstrate by doing."*
- *"Consider environmental factors, ways to measure skill and knowledge holistically."*
- *"Rote learning doesn't work for everyone. Let our kids show their skills in different ways."*

- *"Projects allow us to bring our culture and traditions into the learning process."*
- *"Performance tasks capture real-world skills that standard tests miss."*
- *"Alaska Native/Native American students take time to answer questions, hands-on learning, learning through experience, oral communication, non-verbal gestures- how can this be assessed through online questions?"*
- *"A student is more than their test score. We need a 360-degree view of their abilities."*
- *"Every child learns differently. Assessments should reflect that individuality."*

Stress and Pressure Management: Consider ways to make assessments supportive, not stressful. Creating a positive and encouraging environment during assessments is especially important for those children with developmental and learning disabilities.

- *"Support, not stress - that should be the goal of any assessment."*
- *"A relaxed, positive environment can make all the difference for students who struggle."*
- *"The big issue is that standardized tests like AK Star, the students are taking the test and think that they are being tested... That's putting a lot of stress on the students for them being able to come up with the correct answer. And that's not really what the assessment supposed to be about."*
- *"Exams shouldn't be a threat. They should be a tool for growth."*
- *"I've never had a foster kid who dealt well with testing of any kind. When you've got one set of traumas, you're dealing with any other additional trauma on top is worse."*
- *"I literally have this boy who gets anxiety so bad trying to test that I lose him for an entire five days, he's pretty much out of my classroom the entire time trying to get the tests completed."*

Culturally Knowledgeable Educators: Well-informed educators would be very helpful. Those handling the assessments should be culturally sensitive and knowledgeable. Consider ways to cultivate and attract more Alaska Native teachers and administrators and require cultural education for all educators.

- *"Educators must understand us to teach us effectively."*
- *"Cultural sensitivity isn't optional. It's essential for those conducting assessments"*
- *"If you have administrators that look like the students. If the assessment location is in a setting that is less sterile."*

- *"More Alaska Native Teachers and administrators. Cultural education for Teachers."*

Technology and Accessibility: Those who are planning and conducting the assessments in rural Alaskan communities should consider the technology issues to ensure equitable access. It's important to ensure every student can access and understand the materials.

- *"Tech barriers shouldn't stand in the way of education."*
- *"Every student, no matter where they live, should have the same access to learning materials."*
- *"Assessment content needs to be clear for everyone, regardless of their tech skills or resources."*
- *"...Technology can be a barrier, too. Does the student(s) have easy access to this? Is it providing sufficient opportunities for every student to not only participate, but soak in and fully learn what is being taught?"*
- *"Technology can be a challenge in rural communities. Preparation is not consistent for students."*

Increase Awareness about the Importance of Assessment Results: Consider ways to further involve parents, educators, and the community in understanding and communicating the results of assessments. Parents indicated that they rarely received information on when assessments were taking place, and that the purpose of the assessments was not communicated either ahead of time or following the assessment period. Issues to consider are improving communications with parents, teachers, tribal leaders, village elders, and others in the community; as well as sharing the data collected during the assessments to make it more relevant to their students. Suggestions included creating videos, utilizing social media, and inviting Alaska Native students and leaders to share their stories. Following up with the communities and providing more information on how the data is used should also be part of a plan moving forward. Flyers were talked about as a good way to get the parents information; in several discussions it was mentioned that they read flyers and anything they knew about assessments came from information sent home.

- *"Speaking to the stakeholders in person, travelling to village to do so. Importance: Make assessments relevant to Native Alaskan so parents can relate to the importance of the test."*

- *"Hold events in the community and show them student data compared to the District, the State and the Nation."*
- *"I would create videos and utilize social media using Alaska Native students... ask Quannah Chasinghorse to do a commercial."*
- *"Informational meetings with parents/ families. Discussing assessments given and getting feedback about what they'd like to see."*
- *"Get student input and connect to how students would share positive information about tests to their parents. Be transparent about results in a timely manner."*
- *"Raising awareness about anything is sometimes a real challenge in many communities, but as far as looking for ways to make this more meaningful for Native students I think making sure that voices of Native leaders & educators need to be brought into the dialogue."*
- *"Maybe school wide or community wide conversations where school administrators can answer questions."*

Conclusion:

The considerations outlined in this final section of the DEED Assessment Outreach Project Final Report highlight the significance of culturally responsive assessments, particularly for Alaska Native students and the entities that serve them. There was a strong emphasis on engaging community members, especially elders, to make content relatable and relevant to life in rural Alaska. Additionally, considerations around the importance of respecting traditional schedules and activities, local customs, incorporating diverse assessment methods, and having a broader view of student abilities were emphasized. Technology and accessibility challenges were also underscored and should be a consideration when thinking about the future of assessments for Alaska Native students. The overarching theme that was consistent throughout the project was clear: for a truly valuable educational experience for Indigenous students, assessments must be inclusive, diverse, and culturally respectful.

