

Frequently Asked Questions Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools

*Toward preparing
students to be
college, career, and
culturally ready
graduates*

What is a Cultural Standard?

- Cultural Standards are benchmarks for districts, schools, and educators to measure how well they are responding to the cultural well-being of their students.
- Cultural Standards foster a strong connection between students' experiences in school and their lives outside of school.
- Cultural Standards aim to contextualize content standards by demonstrating real-world application from a culturally inclusive perspective.

How are Alaska's Cultural Standards different from academic standards?

In short, academic standards are *what* students need to know in specific content areas in order to be ready for careers and college. Cultural Standards are suggestions on *how* to present content standards in such a way that all Alaskan students can comprehend, retain, engage, and apply the material.

Are the standards telling instructors how to teach?

No. While the Cultural Standards do contain pedagogical suggestions, they are intended to address special issues of critical importance to rural schools, especially those serving Native communities. They provide guidelines for self-assessment in responding to the cultural needs and perspectives of students.

Who developed the Cultural Standards?

The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative was responsible for developing the cultural standards with funding from the National Science Foundation and Annenberg Rural Challenge, and with input from diverse stakeholders across the state, including:

- The Alaska Federation of Natives
- The Alaska Native Knowledge Network
- The Assembly of Alaska Native Educators
- The University of Alaska

Who is the target audience of the Cultural Standards?

The Cultural Standards have five parts, each designed for a different and important component of the public educational system in Alaska. These include:

- *Students* – Defines the traits of a “culturally-knowledgeable” student.
- *Educators* – Intended for use by instructors at all levels of education and defining what it means to be culturally-responsive in one's teaching.
- *Curriculum* – Sets forth guidelines for assessing how culturally-responsive a program is.



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- *Schools* – Identifies the traits of culturally-responsive and inclusive schools.
- *Communities* – Recognition that children learn all day, not just when in school, and provide information on what a culturally-supportive community looks like.

How is the Department of Education & Early Development helping districts, schools, and teachers implement the Cultural Standards?

In partnership with the Alaska Native Knowledge Network at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, EED offers several guide books to prepare for the Cultural Standards (<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/publications/#standards>). EED is committed to increasing awareness and implementation of the Cultural Standards over the next academic year via:

- Guidelines for Culturally-Responsive School Boards
- Guidelines for Cross-Cultural Orientation Programs
- Guidelines for Strengthening Indigenous Languages
- Guidelines for Preparing Culturally-Responsive Teachers for Alaska’s Schools
- Guidelines for Nurturing Culturally-Healthy Youth
- Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge
- Fall and Spring Teaching & Learning Support Institutes
- Online professional learning supports

How will Alaskan students benefit from the Cultural Standards?

The Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools will:

- Complement instructional content standards
- Support the development of college-, career-, and community-ready graduates
- Help contextualize academic content within the students’ individual world views
- Honor the support and importance of community in K-12 education
- Shift the focus in curriculum from teaching *about* culture heritage to teaching *through* cultural heritage