



2026 BIENNIAL REPORT ON ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGES TO THE GOVERNOR

Council of Alaska Native Languages

March 13, 2026



Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

March 13, 2026

The Honorable Governor Mike Dunleavy, Esteemed Alaska Legislators, and Beloved People of Alaska:

The Council on Alaska Native Languages (CANL), representing more than 23 Alaska Native languages, is honored to present the 2024–2026 Biennial Report on Alaska Native Languages to the Governor, the Alaska State Legislature, and all Alaskans. This report provides suggested pathways for individuals, families, communities, institutions, and governments to embark on a collective journey into our languages and thereby support healthy communities. In coordination with tribal self-determination, we call upon our own communities, the State of Alaska Executive Branch, and the State of Alaska Legislature to actualize healthy language and cultural practices for all Alaskans.

Our Ancestors have reached us through the input of people during our meetings, the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, and the annual language summit. Our future generations depend on what actions we take today. Please join your fellow Alaskans in exercising courage and determination to collectively envision a future where all Alaska Native languages are welcomed and encouraged. We support and explore what decolonization looks like in our communities: cultural empowerment, acknowledgment, and healing. We are working toward strategic planning, ongoing evaluation, and identifying common goals that will help strengthen our efforts to regain and express our unique worldview.

We appreciate the ongoing efforts of Elders, educators, students, leaders, and communities: safeguarding our way of life starts with the words we use and how they construct our identity and our relationship to the world around us. Please continue to have challenging conversations, take bold steps and work with Tribes to safeguard our way of life through the medium of language. The report includes recommended measures needed to protect and promote Indigenous languages as well as general recommendations to the public and specifically to schools. Please join us during this critical time to promote this perspective of life by exercising Indigenous languages.

Iliganamiik, Igamsiqanaghalek, Taikuu, Quyana, Gunalchéesh, Háw'aa, T'oyaxsut 'nüün / N'Doyckshn, Qağaasakung / Aang, Chin'an / Chiqinik, Enaa baasee', Dogidinh, Mahsi' choo, Maasee, Mosiy' / Tsen'anh, Tsen'ji, Tsin'aen, Dogadinh, Awa'ahdah, Thank you.

With respect,
The Council on Alaska Native Languages

Sen. Löki Tobin • Rep. Nellie Jimmie *Yup'ik* • Yaayuk B. Alvanna-Stimpfle *Inupiaq*, *Chair*
Walkie Charles *Yup'ik*, *Vice-Chair* • X'unei Lance Twitchell *Tlingit/Haida/Yup'ik/Sami*
Kay Larson-Blair *Yup'ik/Unangan/Sugpiaq* • Beverly Kokrine, *Athabaskan*
Victoria McKoy, Ggoadm 'Teebn *Shm'algyack-Sm'algyax (Ts'msyen)* and *Xaadkil (Haida)*
Christina Laree Newhall, Ukaatxiġ, *Unangam Tunuu*

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ABOUT THE COUNCIL

The Council on Alaska Native Languages formerly known as the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council (ANLPAC) was created by the Alaska State Legislature in 2012 because the Legislature understood that Alaska’s languages are a critical component in the sustenance of cultural identity of Alaska’s first nation peoples. The Legislature further found that Alaska Native languages are the foundation of cultures and are vital in maintaining traditional knowledge and understanding. The Council is charged with recommending ‘the establishment or reorganization of programs to support the preservation, restoration, and revitalization of Alaska Native languages’ and to advise both the Governor and Legislature on programs, policies, and projects to provide for the cost-effective preservation, restoration, and revitalization of Alaska Native languages in the state. The voting members of the Council are language professionals who work with their Alaska Native languages to see that all our languages continue and flourish as living languages.

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Appointed Members

Yaayuk B. Alvanna-Stimpfle, Inupiaq, Chair

Walkie Charles, Yup’ik, Vice-Chair

Christina Laree Newhall, Ukaatxī, Unangam Tunuu

Beverly Kokrine, Athabaskan

Kay Larson-Blair, Yup’ik/Unangan/Sugpiaq

Victoria McKoy, Ggoadm ‘Teebn Shm’algyack-Sm’algyax (Ts’msyen) and Xaadkil (Haida)

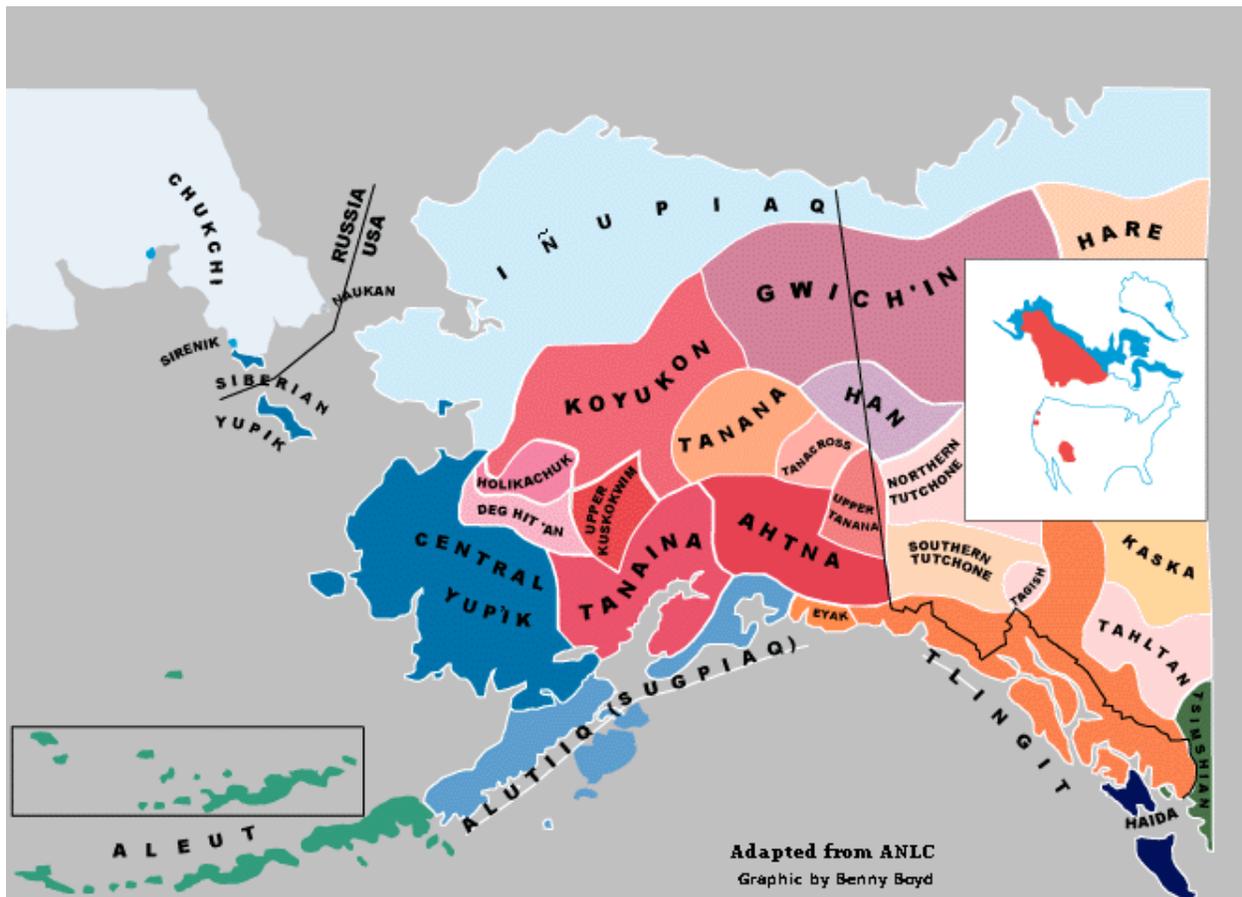
X’unei Lance Twitchell, Tlingit/Haida/Yup’ik/Sami

Legislative Members

Senator Löki Tobin

Representative Nellie Jimmie, Yup’ik

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES OF ALASKA MAP



Alaska Native Language Center, 2011; Michael E. Krauss, Gary Holton, Jim Kerr, and Colin T. Wes.

LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE FAMILIES

Alaska Native languages fall into four language families, sets of languages which appear to be related to each other as descendants of a common, ancestral language in the ancient past. The two large language families in Alaska are the Inuit-Unangan language family, with 10 or 12 languages across much of the Arctic, and the Na-Dene language family. Two additional language families include the Tsimshianic language family, which includes four languages, and the Haida language, a “language isolate.”

ALASKA STATUTE (AS) 44.12.310. OFFICIAL LANGUAGES (2015)

(a) The English, Inupiaq, Siberian Yupik, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Alutiiq, Unangax, Dena'ina, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, Gwich'in, Tanana, Upper Tanana, Tanacross, Han, Ahtna, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian languages are the official languages of the State of Alaska. (b) [Effective January 21, 2015].

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE LOSS

Indigenous language experts know that if we are to reverse the trend of language loss, the goal is to create more fluent speakers, and support immersion programs. Concretely, this means that the first-language speakers are the Indigenous language experts and must be at the forefront of solutions. Indigenous languages are considered “a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage.”¹

The United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage covers various aspects of culture, including oral traditions and artistic forms of expression, etc. Still, language is a distinct element in the spectrum of a people’s culture. One can practice parts of a culture, like song, or arts and cultural objects, but be unable to speak one’s ancestral language. Today, many Tribal nations are working hard, but also have a long way to go, to maintain their Native languages. To implement solutions to the precarious status of Indigenous languages, it is important to understand why these languages are endangered. This requires a perspective and approach that are informed by an understanding and recognition of the trauma suffered by Indigenous peoples. Intentional and unintentional government practices made the intergenerational transmission of Native language almost impossible, resulting in a significant loss of language knowledge. Many existing Native languages are currently endangered.

Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior, recently launched an investigation into the effects of Indian boarding schools on Indian children and their communities. The report from the investigation, submitted in May 2022, opens with a letter that states,

“This report confirms that the United States directly targeted American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children in the pursuit of a policy of cultural assimilation that coincided with Indian territorial dispossession. It identifies the Federal Indian boarding schools that were used as a means for these ends... This report also presents an opportunity for us to reorient our federal policies to support the revitalization of Tribal languages and cultural practices. This reorientation of Federal policy is necessary to counteract nearly two centuries of Federal policies aimed at the destruction of Tribal languages and cultures. In turn, we can help begin a healing process for Indian Country and the Native Hawaiian Community, and the United States, from the Alaskan tundra to the Florida everglades, and everywhere in between.”²

¹ Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Paris, 17 October 2003, Article 2.1. Definition: Intangible Heritage “means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”

² Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior, Investigation into the Effects of Indian Boarding Schools on Indian Children and Their Communities, Volume I, (2022) <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/department-interior-releases-investigative-report-outlines-next-steps-federal-indian>

Using a trauma-informed perspective will allow us to make progress, enhance human rights and provide clarity on the causes and effects of colonial assimilation — in essence, why we are in an emergency today.

By examining centuries of systemic discrimination and land dispossession, it will provide us with an understanding of where we have come from, how we have arrived, where we are today, and where we now want to go.

RECOMMENDED MEASURES TO SAFEGUARD LANGUAGES

With each passing year, we lose Elders who carry traditional knowledge, and we lose first-language speakers. We cannot afford to waste any more time. While statistics help government create policies and programs, they can never convey the level of urgency felt in tribal communities. A vast majority of languages under threat are Indigenous languages. Statistics can only describe the loss abstractly; the real loss is felt by Indigenous peoples themselves. As our Elders say, our language is alive, contains our cosmology, customs, and moral values, and strengthens relationships; it is full of traditional knowledge if you understand the roots of the words you are using. Using a trauma-informed lens shines light on the impacts of genocidal acts like the Indian Residential Schools that punished Indigenous children for speaking their languages. Reclaiming and exercising our languages are the very essence of our identities, including our traditional governance, medicines, health practices, and well-being.

For states, districts, and schools striving to reach these goals, it represents a dramatic paradigm shift from past practices and ideologies. There is also a need to extend the knowledge among many educators and leaders about their Indigenous students' cultures and communities to enhance their commitment to work toward the current equity-focused mandate. Indigenous peoples are still grieving a wide range of losses, including the loss of our ancestors from genocide, land dispossession, the loss of children in the Indian Residential School system, and the ensuing traumatic individual and societal effects of all these losses. As one Elder stated: "It took over a hundred years for our languages to be brought to this point of extinction, it may take another hundred years to bring them back." As we mourn all our losses today, it is thanks to the stories of survivors and traditional-knowledge holders that there is still a chance to revitalize and maintain our precious ancestral languages.

Language is an important link to our ancestors and is key in enabling present and future generations. Our languages outline our relationship with the land. They contain a historical account of our creation stories and legends that give us our moral compass. Without our

languages and our lands, without our stories, we are empty and have become assimilated. Indigenous languages are so much more than a form of expression; they are an important part of who we are. The report recommends measures listed below to help protect and promote Indigenous languages. Recommendations are made in coordination with the CANL meetings and feedback from tribal members and the general public. General Guidelines and Guidelines for Schools are also included to further strengthen indigenous languages. It is time that this becomes more than a priority, but rather a right that present and future generations can enjoy.

RECOMMENDED MEASURES NEEDED TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

The following measures are recommended to safeguard, strengthen, and advance Indigenous languages across Alaska through coordinated policy, funding, and community action.

- Guaranteeing the right to mother-tongue education for Indigenous children
- Allocating the funding and resources needed to preserve and develop Indigenous languages, and particularly for education
- Establishing language-immersion programs for both Indigenous children and adults
- Raising the equity of Indigenous languages by promoting their use in public administration, academic institutions, and public spaces
- Using Indigenous languages so that they are kept alive and passed down through the generations by Indigenous peoples themselves

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to support the effective implementation of the guidelines for strengthening Indigenous languages.

- Help develop tracking tools for language speakers, learners, teachers, and all language development outreach
- Create a systematic approach to service delivery throughout the Department of Education and Early Development that encompasses Native language instruction, cultural perspectives, and pedagogy
- Native educator associations (including Elders) shall develop guidelines for assessing fluency and levels of proficiency in heritage languages for use in various contexts
- Federal and state funding support for Indigenous language initiatives shall be expanded, and all Native language funding should be administered through, or in partnership with, federally recognized Tribes or Native-controlled entities
- School districts shall require a cross-cultural specialist endorsement for all personnel with responsibilities that impact the cultural well-being of the students and communities they serve

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Schools can help strengthen the heritage language through the following actions:

- Ensure the language policies and practices in school are consistent with the language aspirations of the parents and community
- Provide follow-through support for local language curriculum advisory committee recommendations, as well as incentives for students to participate in the heritage language programs that are offered
- Incorporate appropriate traditional cultural values and beliefs in all teaching, particularly when the heritage language is involved
- Collaborate with Elders and Native teachers from the local community to acquire a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the local, regional and statewide context in which the students live, particularly as it relates to the well-being and survival of the local culture
- Provide heritage language courses for students in every high school in Alaska, especially those with Native students enrolled
- Implement the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools in all aspects of the educational program, including those cultural standards that pertain to heritage languages