

Implementing Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators in Evaluation Systems: Issues, Solutions, Guidance

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All school districts in Alaska are currently in the process of responding to new Alaska state regulations regarding redesigning educator evaluation systems. School districts are in different phases: exploring research, considering options, or even early implementation. One major addition to the new regulations is the requirement that districts modify their evaluation systems to include four (4) cultural standards for educators that have never been required before in the evaluation process.

This white paper outlines issues, possible solutions, and guidance for districts when considering how to embed the four new cultural standards into a district's evaluation system.

A "*Guide to Implementing the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators*" was prepared in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, the Alaska Comprehensive Center, Alaska Native Educators, and Education Northwest in May 2012. There were five (5) standards identified in the guide. When the State Board of Education adopted the standards as part of educator evaluation regulations in December 2012, however, Standard C was not included because it describes actions and behaviors that occur outside of the classroom and can not be observed as part of an educator's evaluation process.

Discussions in districts will be necessary to gather information from students, parents, community members, classroom teachers, affected collective bargaining units, and administrators as redesigning evaluation systems takes place.

Clearly, preparing teachers to teach children of diverse racial, ethnic, social class, and language backgrounds is a pressing issue for educators today and will continue to be for some time to come. Recently KTUU Channel 2 in Anchorage did a piece on three Anchorage high schools being among the most diverse high schools in the entire U.S. Given the reality of our diverse state, these changes in educator evaluation regulations are well supported.

Research¹ identifies six salient characteristics for a culturally responsive teacher that supports Alaska’s four cultural standards for educators. Culturally responsive teachers:

1. are socioculturally conscious, that is, they recognize that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that these ways are influenced by one’s location in the social order;
2. have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in ALL students rather than viewing differences as problems to be overcome;
3. see themselves as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students;
4. understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting learners’ knowledge construction;
5. know about the lives of their students; and
6. use their knowledge about students’ lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar.

These qualities are central to the four Cultural Standards for Alaska Educators.

The rest of this paper will discuss possible issues in more depth and provide some ideas for solutions and guidance to districts as they embark upon implementing the new educator evaluation regulations.

Four issues have been identified below:

1. ***Alignment*** of the AK Cultural Standards with the AK Professional Standards;
2. ***Integration*** of the AK Cultural Standards into approved district evaluation frameworks or systems;
3. ***Misinterpretation*** of the cultural standards based on various local, regional perspectives if districts choose to independently create new indicators; and
4. Outlining effective ***professional learning*** for the AK Cultural Standards that lead to effective teaching practices.

Issue #1: Alignment of the AK Cultural Standards with the AK Professional Standards

Issue #2: Integration of the AK Cultural Standards into approved district evaluation frameworks or systems

Integrating the cultural standards/indicators into new or existing district evaluation frameworks is work that requires careful thought, planning, and consideration. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development has given approval of three research-based evaluation frameworks: Danielson, Marzano, and the Center on Educational Leadership (CEL) model from the University of Washington. In the review and approval of these frameworks, it has been determined that the frameworks provide information and data about teacher practice that is most closely aligned with the Alaska Professional Standards. The new regulation stipulates that districts must provide a rating on each educator in each of

¹ “Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the Curriculum”, Villegas and Lucas, *Journal of Teacher Education* 2002

the seven evaluated professional standards. A visual representation (pg. 3), shows that the Cultural Standards are to be integrated into the seven professional standards.

Concerns:

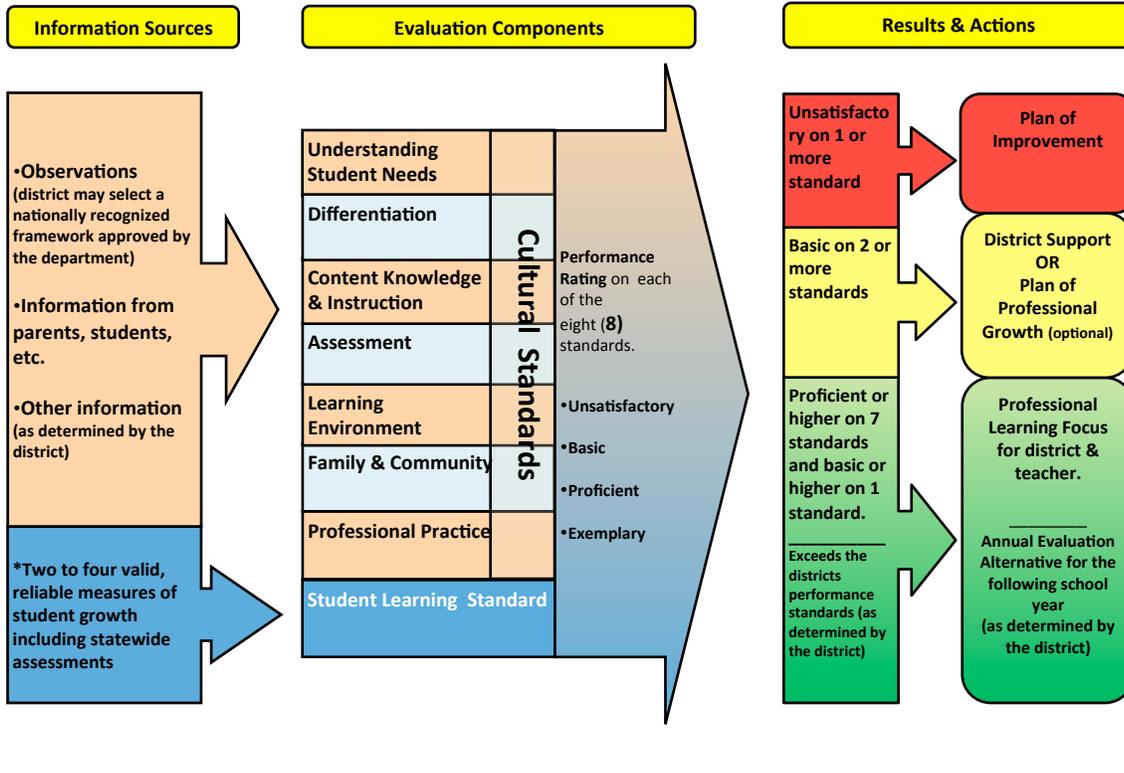
- None of the state approved frameworks specifically address Alaska's Cultural Standards.
- The Cultural Standards have not been explicitly aligned with or integrated into the AK Professional Standards.
- When integrating the Cultural Standards into a district's evaluation framework, one must first understand the schema of organization in the selected evaluation framework. For example, Marzano's and Danielson's frameworks are categorized into four domains. Further within each domain there are sub-categories of elements and indicators. Without understanding how the framework is organized and how it aligns with the AK Professional Standards, there is potential for a lack of understanding about the language of instruction and expectations for what the teacher is expected to know and do. Interpretation and analysis of teacher behaviors may not be clear or concise. Valid and reliable integration requires common understandings about the language of instruction being used and measured.

Suggestions:

- Explicitly study and understand why and how the topics, concepts, and evaluation components of the evaluation framework selected by the district are organized. (Schema)
- Once all who are involved in the alignment process collectively understand the schema, begin to crosswalk the framework with all of the AK Professional Standards and their accompanying teacher performances. This step is necessary in helping to inform decisions made later when aligning the Cultural Standards and to bring clarity to their meaning and intent.
- Unpack the four Cultural Standards to gain an understanding of the intent of each one.
- Determine where the Cultural Standards bring enhanced meaning and align specifically to the AK Professional Standards.

Understanding the organization of the selected evaluation framework, cross-walking it with the Professional Standards/Performances, and unpacking and aligning the Cultural Standards helps everyone gain a common understanding of the language and intent of all three components and how they support each other. (AK Professional Standards, AK Cultural Standards, District selected evaluation framework)

Educator Evaluation Requirements



Issue #3: Misinterpretation of the cultural standards based on various local, regional perspectives if districts choose to independently create new indicators.

The third issue arises from a regulation passed by the State Board of Education² stating that a district may choose the indicators from the original document noted earlier in this paper (*“Guide to Implementing.....”*), or a district may choose to create and adopt their own indicators for each of the standards with local interpretation, application, and meaning.

Concerns:

- There are weaknesses in the terminology/language of the indicators in the “Guide” for the explicit purpose of evaluating teacher growth and performance. The development of the implementation guide arose out of a desire to help schools and districts meet the specific educational needs of Alaska’s indigenous people and incorporate their unique and diverse

² 4 AAC 04.205 (b) (1-4) District performance standards

knowledge into district's curricula.³ The indicators in the original document were not intended to be the basis for evaluation or for making comparisons between teachers.⁴ Instead the indicators in that document were intended to help educators incorporate the Cultural Standards into their instruction and curriculum. They were designed to raise awareness, to identify instructional approaches, and to guide educators in planning and conducting culturally responsive lessons. They also were intended for an educator to self-reflect and identify his/her own level of awareness and implementation of culturally responsive practices. They provide more of a guide into what the element might look in practice, enabling the educator to more readily adapt and implement the practice through the use of exemplars. If a district chooses to use the indicators in the Guide, those indicators do not always specifically use language and terms that are measurable and/or evaluative. The indicators were also designed to be used in a "team" approach by assessing the overall practices of the school and create a school wide plan to implement them into the curriculum.⁵

- If districts choose to create and adopt their own indicators for each of the Cultural Standards with local interpretation, application, and meaning, there is potential for misinterpretation, misapplication, and misunderstanding unless a well-established procedure and set of protocols for vetting the indicators for validity and reliability is in place.

Suggestions:

- In determining culturally-responsive indicators that measure effectiveness and growth of a teacher relative to those indicators, districts need to remember that there are many cultures represented in their student population and if the Cultural Standards were applied to all students of all cultures, there would be more of a "broad stroke" or generic application of the indicators, not just one that is specific to a culture group.
- Whether a district chooses to use the indicators in the "Guide" or to create and adopt their own indicators for each of the Cultural Standards, there must be a process in place to vet the indicators for reliability and validity with clearly articulated procedures and protocols.

Issue #4: Outlining effective professional learning for the AK Cultural Standards that lead to effective teaching practices

The six salient characteristics outlined on page one of this paper serve as the organizing framework for infusing professional learning about cultural responsiveness throughout a teacher's growth and development. They should be woven throughout not only the preservice of teachers in coursework, but in ongoing embedded experiences in the daily performance of instruction.

³ pg. v *Guide to Implementing the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators*

⁴ pg. 1 *Guide to Implementing the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators*

⁵ pg. 3 *Guide to Implementing the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators*

Concerns:

- There is never enough time for professional learning. Cultural standards enter the arena as another competitor for professional learning time with many other equally important competing initiatives.
- There are concerns that it is “one more thing” on the plate of administrators responsible for evaluation and for the teachers who are accountable for implementing the indicators into their instruction.
- The Cultural Standards may also be seen as an isolated or separate thing, in their own silo, not as infused or embedded into effective teacher practices.

Suggestions:

- Districts should use the Cultural Standards/Indicators as another lens when designing and planning any professional learning. Math, reading, PBIS, science, technology and any other professional development can be enriched and enhanced by learning to see how the Cultural Standards can be applied.
- It’s not new. It’s a different way of looking. Administrators and teachers can infuse and align the Cultural Standards with what they are already doing in evaluation and instruction. It is important that the Cultural Standards be aligned and embedded into a district’s evaluation framework. Teachers should begin to see through a cultural lens when planning instruction using the six salient characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher.

SOLUTION:

Measuring teacher effectiveness for growth and improvement is a serious matter when it comes to validity and reliability. The Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC) has taken a proactive approach to this issue concerning the infusion of Cultural Standards into AK teacher evaluation.

SERRC, in partnership with Bering Strait School District and the Alaska Native Educators Association, was awarded an Alaska Native Education and Equity grant called “Project CREATE: Culturally Responsive Evidences for Alaska Teacher Effectiveness.” One of the grant’s objectives is to create cultural indicators, or teacher behaviors, for each of the four AK Cultural Standards.

During the first initial stage of the grant, effort was spent on aligning the AK Professional Standards with the frameworks of Marzano, Danielson, and the CEL state approved evaluation framework models. After this work, a common language was built around those models and the Cultural Standards were viewed using this common language of the frameworks to see where and how the Cultural Standards aligned with the AK Professional Standards and approved evaluation frameworks.

The second stage of the work involved hiring cultural consultants, many of whom were the original writers of the “*Guide to Implementing the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators*”. These consultants were given the task to develop and create new indicators that kept the original intent of each cultural

standard yet were written with evaluative and measurable language and could be observed in any classroom in Alaska and used with all students of all cultures.

Also in the second stage, attention was given to supporting the new cultural indicators by creating teacher evidences and student evidences that are observable in order to rate or measure a teacher's use or implementation of the standard/indicator. Since one of the issues in this paper identified the concern of professional learning, the cultural consultants also developed self-reflection questions that can be used by the teacher and/or the evaluator as a springboard of discussion in helping to guide what next steps may be necessary in improving the performance of the cultural indicator. Throughout the entire second stage, four rounds of vetting occurred to ensure reliability and validity.

The final stage of Project CREATE will include the development of a guidance manual or handbook for all districts in Alaska to use when implementing the AK Cultural Standards as a component of their new district evaluation systems. Also in the final stage to occur in school year 2014-2015, the cultural indicators will be field tested in four different districts in Alaska to determine quality, ease of use, and impact on student engagement and motivation.

Future work has been identified for the scalability of this grant to include extensive professional learning opportunities for teachers and evaluators.

If you have questions or need clarification on any of these issues, concerns, suggestions, or solutions, please feel free to contact Gerry Briscoe, Director of SERRC's Project CREATE in Anchorage, AK at (907) 349-0651 or email at gerryb@serrc.org.