

## **Family and Community Engagement in Young Children's Native Language Learning and Development**

### **Family Engagement, Language, and Literacy Webinar Series**

Joshua Sparrow: Hello, everybody. I'm Joshua's Sparrow, and I am one of the co-principal investigators for the National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement for the Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care. And we are thrilled to be able to give you the second in the two-part webinar series on engaging families and children in young children's native language learning. And I'm now going to ask our wonderful group of presenters and panelists, who we are so privileged to have with us and so grateful, to introduce themselves. Then I'll start by turning over to Dr. Christine Sims.

Dr. Christine Sims: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Christine Sims from Acoma Pueblo, and I'm tuning in from the University of New Mexico here in Albuquerque. And I'm glad that everybody is able to join us this afternoon. Mike.

Micker Richardson: Sorry. I forgot to introduce myself.

[Speaking tribal language]

My name is Mike Richardson, the Director of the National American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Collaboration Office. And I'm honored to be here with all the panelists that are here with us today, those who were with us last week, as well. And we're looking forward to continuing this debate. Language revitalization is a huge part of what we're doing in with the Office of Head Start now especially for the Region XI. But we also want to reach out to all of our areas that have tribal children that the language becomes a part of all of our communities and a major part as we move forward to connect our children back to their heritage and to their language foundations. Thank you for being with us here today. Excuse my voice, I have allergies. But thank you, everybody, for being here and I thank our panelists gathered here, and for Dr. Joshua Sparrow for putting this together. Thank you.

Brooke Ammann: Bonjour. I'm Brooke Ammann. I'm representing Lac Courte from the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Institute here in beautiful Wisconsin, in the center of our national homelands.

Ethan Petticrew: Hello, folks, and actually, I have to say good morning because I'm still in Alaska and it's not noon yet here. But I am the executive director for Cook Inlet Native Head Start, and I'll get into it more, but we serve all 21 native languages in Alaska. So I'm very glad to be here. And my passion has always been, I've been in education for quite a while, but my passion is culture and language and how do we get it into the schools. So glad to be here, and glad to be working on this group. Joseph: I'm going to ask Lana Garcia and Howard Hayden if you would both also introduce yourselves. Lana and Howard presented the work they've been doing in their communities in our first webinar, which will be posted on the Head Start ECLKC website. And they've been generous enough to come back again today to participate in our discussion. So, Lana and Howard, if you would introduce yourself, please.

Lana Garcia: Good afternoon, and welcome back to part two of this language and culture webinar which we're really just so happy that so many of you called in last week and took part in the webinar. We're just really excited and we hope that by sharing our stories and our challenges, our successes that you all would be inspired to continue to do the work. My name is Lana Garcia. I'm from the Pueblo of Jemez, and I'm managing the Walatowa Head Start program which is now in its fifth year of full language immersion implementation. Thank you for having me again.

[Speaking tribal language]

Howard Hayden: Hello, I'm Howard Hayden from Cherokee Nation. I work with the master apprentice program. It is a program that is for adults to learn how to learn a language and learn how to teach. It's a program that stays in the target language which is Cherokee for two years, eight hours a day, five days a week. So we've been making quite a bit of headway. And I know that everybody will truly, truly enjoy and listen to these experts regarding saving our mother languages. And they have conveyed so much in our meetings prior to this webinar that I believe that these are some of the top notch language warriors of our time. So I truly, truly enjoyed being involved in this. Hope everybody enjoys this webinar.

Joseph: Thank you, Howard. And we are grateful to all of you for working with us to share your experiences and wisdom and to everybody who has joined in on this webinar and the webinar we offered last week. Our learning objectives are, first, to share together the opportunities and the challenges for engaging families and communities in young children's native language learning and development. And we offer the experiences this time and last week of several different communities but of course understand that they were more than 560 federally recognized tribes and many more tribes in addition to those and that each one of them has their own unique culture. Many of them have their own languages and the opportunities, and challenges for engaging families and communities will be unique although there may also be some common threads. Our second learning objective is to learn from the experiences of a range of native communities but understanding well that we couldn't possibly represent the richness and diversity of all of the cultures in these many, many different communities.

And finally, to listen together so that we can identify strategies for engaging families and communities based on the experiences shared. And here the idea is not that there necessarily will be something in the work that you'll hear today from Brooke or Ethan that you can directly apply to your community because your community has its own culture and its own language but that it may spark some ideas for you and with your own creativity lead you to your own strategies that would be fitting for who you are and where you are and where you come from. And here, just as a reminder, is the Head Start Program Performance Standard on tribal language preservation and revitalization for those of you who are working in Tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs. So now I'm going to ask Dr. Christine Sims to come back and to give us a brief summary of the laying out the foundations of engaging families, and communities, and children's native language learning that she so beautifully laid out for us in our webinar last week.

Dr. Sims: Thank you, Josh. Thank you, Dr. Sparrow. So just very briefly, what we heard from last week's webinar were two examples again drawn from two very different experiences in terms of implementing language revitalization efforts into communities here in Jemez Pueblo, here in New Mexico that was presented by Lana Garcia.

And the other presentation by Howard about the Cherokee experience. And just as a quick summary, I think what we heard from both these presentations. There is the importance of engaging both the community and parents in the process of language learning for young children. And why this is so important is because the essential element of children being able to hear that language being used and also engaging them in the use of that language is so very important in their young years, in their developing years because a lot of this also sends important messages to children that native language learning is important and is valued and that it has a place in their daily life. The other thing that we, I think, heard from both Lana and Howard is that language used among young children is really about re-strengthening that communication between children and their parents, between children and their families, between children and the language community that they come from. And so what this means, of course, is that we are

also talking about language use beyond the classrooms. And so while we know that classroom environment can be helpful and supportive, they can't entirely do everything in terms of language revitalization as a community-wide kind of process.

So engaging families and communities in the process of learning language is so very important. Lana happened to mention last week, for example, that they have family nights that they have time set aside just for bringing mothers and fathers and perhaps grandparents together where they engage in learning about ways they can support their children's language learning at home. Howard mentioned a really interesting aspect about their community with regard to their use of community resource people, people who themselves as adults are learning the language and in turn going back and using that language to engage children in the learning of Cherokee. So we also know from what they shared with us that there are some very distinct differences, Jemez for example is an unwritten language.

And so the focus of their efforts in the Jemez Walatowa Head Start program is to focus on oral communication. And so the foundation for teaching Jemez, the language, is drawn from the work that the community engaged in, in identifying what their cultural foundations were, and that became the basis of what they now teach in terms of children's experiences in learning Towa at the Jemez Head Start program. All of these elements are essential for helping to support children learning language. But, perhaps, maybe in line with the focus of this webinar, one of the key essential things that I think we heard over and over again was how that intergenerational strengthening is an important part of young children's development because in the end, it really contributes to their overall well-being.

And it's part of their growing development of their own identity but also identity with the language community and the tribal community they come from. It's about helping them find their place in the world so that they become hopefully children who grow up to be contributing and caring members of their families and their communities. Howard mentioned briefly about the Cherokee belief and how, as adults, we have responsibilities to help nurture that child. And that child has his own internal innate potential for growing. And we as adults must help nurture that. Dr. Sparrow talked very quickly about the cognitive benefits. There were questions on in fact raised from some of our participants about, well, what does this mean for English, you know? And a lot of notions sometimes that we have about language learning is that there is a limited capacity of the brain which we know is not true.

You know, children have the capacity to learn more than one language even before the age of five. And so we have to also think about what the cognitive benefits are for children who are engaged in learning their language and how this actually is part of the foundation of future academic learning when they become confident in who they are, their identity, and all the educational research that we know contributes to that idea of becoming good students, good learners in the end. Just a couple of other things I want to just mention here is that, again, referring both to what Lana and Howard shared with us in terms of the cultural foundation. That really stood out, I think, in terms of how that becomes the foundation or that should be part of the foundation of our language teaching because culture helps guide this aspect of children's learning and development. It guides how we relate to one another and our language learning should be inclusive of the ways we use language in our communities to establish relationships with one another.

I know, in some languages, there are social protocols about how you greet an adult, or an elder, or maybe a tribal leader. In some languages, for example, there may also be social protocols about how you use language when, even as simple as, you know, moving away from the dinner table or whenever you're done eating. In some cultures, there are specific male-female kinds of

speech that children learn very early on. So all of these kinds of elements for learning a language are more than just about learning words, they're about learning how that language is used by a particular community. And children are notorious for wanting to use language to get things done. There are children who want to learn and who want to explore, so our language teaching should also remember those principles about how children develop.

Brooke: All right. Well. I guess I want to just thank you for taking the time out today to come and listen in to us. And I'm --

[Speaking tribal language]

I'm from the St. Croix Ojibwe tribe, but I'm also of the people where I work now at Lac Courte. And I'm representing both Lac Courte and the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Institute. And I just wanted to give a little bit of our Institute's, I guess, approach. It's a work that's in development. A few years ago, we started to examine what we do and what we're about and the kind of things that we've done to revitalize our language here. And we identified, first of all, that we have mentors in Hawaii and they discussed this womb to tomb educational system that there is opportunities to learn from beginning to end of our current existence on this earth. And that is something that we recognize that we wanted to plan for as well because many of our speakers and our grandparents, people we knew, they never stopped learning about everything, about everything that was put in front of them. And so we really wanted to also, I guess, revitalize that method of viewing education, that it's not something that ends when you get some paper. And so we did identify that. And the other thing we've identified is that the center of our work is our language, that it holds so many keys to telling us that how we should behave with each other, ways to learn, ways to do, you know, critical enquiry, just so many things are language focused.

So we identified four activities that we are focused on at the institute. And one of them is our indigenous language medium classrooms. And in those, we're currently in this year and next year, we're doing kindergarten through seventh grade. And we have teachers in training right now that are part of, kind of, a teacher training program in development as well. So we are developing teachers for early childhood, preschool, and at the same time, we're developing an eighth grade. So it's a lot of work, working to develop kind of both ends of that spectrum, but it's getting us, we hope, a little bit closer to our idea of learning, learning for the entire span of life. And the other thing that we do is the curriculum and immersion teacher development. And that also includes doing developments for adults and community education. We also do work with language revitalization research and development. We identified that a lot of more mainstream work in how languages are revitalized and how we can do that, they're not always culturally appropriate as well, and they don't consider the layers of experience that are associated with their language loss and revitalization. And then the last one that we identified is community language revitalization and indigenous outreach that not only were we working to do language revitalization here, but this is something that is happening all over.

And our strength is in connecting to each other in, you know, ways like this, like having this meeting today but also trying to talk to each other and try to learn more about what we're doing and maybe figure out some ways that we might approach doing this or something that's been successful or something that just completely failed because our thinking in that was that we don't have a lot of time, most of us are suffering from depletion of our resources, our people who speak these languages are leaving us or they're gone or maybe we have to restore it from other sources. So we kind of identified that if we can learn as much as we can from other people doing this, then maybe we won't lose time with those people if we still have them with us. It's precious time and precious opportunity. So I'm going to go on to -- I don't have -- Just so you know, I don't have a whole bunch of words. I did all pictures for this because I thought maybe that

examples -- But I'll just be talking, and then I'll tell you about pictures that are in the presentation as well. So some of the opportunities that we identified here are that there's a real interest in cultural revitalization in the Ojibwe country. In our tradition, we have a lot of opening ceremonies, offerings, and there's customary, I guess, starts to events of all kinds. And all of those are done in the Ojibwe language. And because more people were wanting to rediscover their Ojibwe heritage, their life ways, they will attend those events and they'll hear people speaking and they'll think, "I should find out what they're talking about, like maybe I should learn what they're saying." And then what happens then is people say well, why do we say things that way or why are we doing this. And so I think that is an important place to start off with engaging communities and families. And also, here at Lac Courte, we really do, we are really blessed with the continuity of language and cultural customs. They're really linked to subsistent life ways and, you know, I always hear people and we even talk about it but poverty levels and we're really impoverish. But at the same time, we have a fairly decent land base, and it provides a lot of food.

And the people here, especially at Lac Courte, and I know that's true in other Ojibwe homelands as well that, there's a lot food out there in the earth. We do a lot of hunting and gathering and not just for ceremonial use but just for regular -- You know, regular meals, daily meals. So important foods for us are wild game fish, we gather wild rice, there's plants like fiddleheads ferns are big thing right now, tea and medicine. So these are staples for many families here just for regular daily use and nourishment. So this is also a really important jumping off spot for engaging families. A lot of families here have memories of people who taught them food gathering. And there's customs associated with that gathering such as making the offerings before you start, feasting to enter open waters, returning the remains, especially, of animals to the places they came from, and other really important practices. So we also have a really rich history of cultural socializing here, which I call it that. That includes social singing and dancing, storytelling, and utilitarian and fine art production. So those are also really, like people maybe can't speak their language but they do remember -- Doing some of these things when they learned how to gather, and hunt, and make art, so that's another -- That's like an important link to language that can get people engaged. Another important opportunity and practice for engaging community is coming from a place of healing. And so, you know, what does that mean to a community? I think that's something we all have to figure out for ourselves, like it is part of the process of being a part of the group that we're part of as indigenous people. In our community here, it really means asking for help, like always from the spirit, from each other, from that food we gather, from everywhere, from even the guardians of our languages.

So we try to start activities with tobacco offerings, food offerings. We really make sure, we try to be sure about what we're trying to do with our staff, with each other, with families. We try to address people and problems directly to reestablish relationships and trust because our communities, ours especially, have self-courage intensely from in-fighting, mistrust, back-fighting, you know, oppressive kind of passive aggressive behaviors. So an important part of our practice is being as inclusive as we can, I would say as inclusive as our revolution allows because sometimes declaring our ways and our language to be of primary importance, it is difficult for traumatized people to handle. They might think we're trying to shut them out because we decide we're just not going to speak English today. But the best way of ensuring our success is really how we behave and how our children behave. So I'd say, for us, you know, our children are visibly content, they're respectful, they have insight into our culture that sometimes it's not even clear to us as adults when we're struggling with our kind of like colonized or tainted ways of thinking. And when we start from a place where when parents and families know we're working from a place of health and wellness in educating our children, it's one thing that we do have in common that we all want that. And that's an important foundation for starting out. So I guess

the real challenge is what's the hook for your community, what is the thing that will bring people to you. And of course, there's challenges, like we could do like five hours talking about the challenges of this work. For us here, we have a wealth of educational opportunities but limited options for early childhood. When we started a discussion with our local Head Start -- You know, there's a lot of entrenchment there, and talking about changes or adding to the team, it was really difficult, and it wasn't able to happen. And I'm not saying that will never happen, but we just have to assess different opportunities for how we can continue doing more early childhood.

And of course, you know, we have a lot of lack of speakers, lack of resources, but we really try to focus on what we do have and make the most of it. So I have these slides, and I've put them up there because I wanted just to remind you like what we're doing, and I think can move them backwards, but like these are our Minogizhwewin. It's kind of the rule. So you can see in here the students like up on the left hand is saying like what do you do if you spill something, what do you do if someone wants to do something, what if they steal your turn, what if someone is by themselves. So we've set up these little examples of how do you approach them, what do you do to help your friends, what do you do to make things right with people. And then there's expectations that we're going to listen, we'll walk, we'll be quiet when we're supposed to, clean up, you know, those are just examples. Another one is literacy. We have chosen literacy as a means of, as a means of revitalizing our language so you can see we have some pre-literacy sound recognition in our preschool or early childhood and actually literacy and teaching students to read in kindergarten. So this year, all of our kindergarten students are able to read where, at the end of the year, they're all reading in Ojibwe.

And we're in a project right now doing literacy development, and we'll be moving on with how to support students who have learned to read in Ojibwe, how to support their English reading. So that's just an example. This is Asin, he looks really sad, but he's super pumped to be reading, really, he's just looks that way. And then this is just some examples of, like, science and lifecycle. So this is, you see a little -- The lifecycle of a butterfly. So we're doing things that students this age do to support their academic work as well, but it's done in Ojibwe from our perspective, so. Another example here, these are all the types of things you'd use or things you'd do when you're at Sugarbush. So the students, they go out to Sugarbush and do some of these things, and then they learn, there's a lot of cycles in this and then order. So there's, you know, a sequencing that's part of this work as well. And that happens before they actually go out, so they have vocab, they have some familiarity with what they'll be expected to do when they go out to the woods themselves. And we do teach time, like non-Indian time, I guess. So they're getting that as a foundation and as work for their math foundations as well. So. Some of their most memorable experiences are being out in woods, we even have graduates now having babies, they're grown up, and they think of Waadookodaading and they remember their time spent at Sugarbush or gathering rice. So that's about all I think I can say at the moment. So thank you for listening. [Speaking tribal language]

Joshua: [Speaking tribal language] Brooke. I am now going to encourage everybody participating to keep putting their questions and comments in the chat box. We will come to them with the time remaining at the end of the webinar. And now we'll turn to Ethan Petticrew, who is going to tell us about his work in Alaska.

Ethan: Thank you, Brooke. And now over to you, Ethan. [Speaking tribal language] Hello, my name is Ethan, and I work at Cook Inlet Native Head Start in Anchorage, Alaska. I'm Unangax from Aleutian Islands. And if you're looking at this map here, my family's home village is right there. It's called Chaluka, which is the oldest continuously inhabited community in North America. It's 12,000 years old. But I raised my children further out, it's off the map. It's out here

in Akhiok. And I raised them there because it was our last fluent village and one of my immersed in that. Since then now I live in Anchorage. I was in public education for 21 years. And my passion is language and culture and how do we make that work in the educational setting. We know how we do it in our traditional settings, how do we make it work in basically Western education or how do we transform Western education to work for us, I guess, would be more appropriate to say. So we serve 227 families here in Anchorage, 227 Alaskan native families. And we're serving Alaska native families from all 21 different languages.

You look at this map, starting on the coast, our languages are all related there. It's called the Eskimo-Aleut language family. These are the Athabaskans languages here, so the Denean languages that exist. And these are Tlingit, I should say Na-Dene, and then Haida people and Tsimshians which came from out of Canada. But those are 21 of our languages in Alaska. We live in not in a village, but we live in an urban area. So we see everybody's language here and, of course, everybody wants their language top. We have 190 kids, 3 to 5 years old, and we have 3 full-day Head Start classrooms, 4 part-day classrooms, and we're operating 7 sessions a day to those part-days. There's 37 early Head Start kids from birth to three, eight center based in full-day classroom, and then 29 in a home-based program served by 2 teachers. Most of our classrooms have three educators in each of them.

And then our population that we're serving is primarily Alaska native. We do have a few American-Indians who have moved up here and have put their kids in the program. But in Anchorage, there are 37,208 Alaskan natives living here, 4, 215 are American-Indian Alaska native children between the ages of 0 to 4, and we're the only tribal Head Start. And we're only serving 227 of those little guys. So it kind of gives you an understanding, I guess, as a program, everybody of course in here wants their culture taught, they want their language taught. And our board feels strongly that that eventually needs to happen. We use a community assessment to drive pretty much what our program's doing. And this one you're looking at right now is actually an older one. We just finished our new one, came in after this got sent out. So currently, we have 73 percent of our family responses indicated that Alaska native culture, has to be, must be incorporated or is very important to be incorporated into our preschool programming.

And currently, in Anchorage, there's only Cook Inlet Head Start, Clare Swan Early Learning Center, and the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School are the only opportunities people have to go to participate in Alaska native culture in an educational setting. So the other thing that we've noticed with our community assessment, and we see this state-wide with other research and data, is the decline in our speakers. Everybody I think, and a lot of times, people below 40 think Alaska was untouched by colonization, and that's totally untrue. We have been colonized since the 1700s up here, first by Russia and then by The United States, and in between, some areas from the British. So the big hit to our languages came, though, in boarding school years where our kids in our villages were hauled out of the village at least nine months every year and sent to boarding school. And same story I think in the lower 48 with those folks, with few people down with there, same story, the impact on languages. I grew up with some kids who never got to leave boarding school for 12 years because their village was so isolated. When they did go home, they could speak to nobody because everybody in the village still spoke their native language, these little guys, well, they were teenagers by then, could not speak. So it's had a definite impact on us, and colonization is destroying our languages.

And so there's a huge wake-up right now in Alaska. In fact, the first language is now we have no more speakers, that's Eyak. And so with that, there was a huge call and a wake-up to do something about revitalizing our languages and bringing them back. We see that with our speakers, with our own families through our community assessment that were done that the

number of children enrolled in the school district whose families speak Alaskan native languages continues to decline every year. For an example, since the last community assessment was done in 2015, the Yup'ik speaking homes have decreased from 208 to 167. In 2011, when we first opened, our community assessment stated that there were 304 children from Yup'ik speaking homes. So we're seeing a big decline just locally even. The other thing that came out in our community assessment is parent commitment to immersion.

And at first, when we did this a couple years ago, there was not a big push to immersion. But we started doing a lot decolonization, and resiliency, and healing workshops, and it has woken our people up. And now we're getting 63 percent of our families are indicating that they are very interested in immersion programming for their children. And 84 percent of those are saying that they're very committed to this. I know that's all data and we all get tied up in data. But at Head Start, we all know we need to talk about those things. So I want to get into specifically native cultural programming and what we do and how we engage our families. And the first thing we started off with is Alaska native values. These values are shared by -- These 10 values are shared by all of our regions in Alaska, all of our 21 different language groups, 21 different languages in Alaska. In Alaska, when we say tribe, tribe in Alaska is specifically one village is considered a tribe. So I know that's a little different again in the lower 48, but -- So these 10 values are what we base a lot of our educational programming on.

We're currently in the process of developing curriculum. We have been for the last three years with some consultants. And our values are embedded in there. And why we want our values there is because as Alaska native people, the last 20 years, we've looked at how has our lives changed. And our lives have changed drastically. We still hunt and fish subsistence food. I don't paddle my grandfather's kayak and use his harpoon. I go alone with an outboard and a rifle. So we've changed the way we do things. And people come up here and they get real disappointed when they come to our villages and they're like, "You're not paddling kayaks." My response is you're not driving a Conestoga wagon anymore either. So I think that the thing that has not changed for us, and our elders agree with this across the state, are our value systems. And each of us have our own value systems. The university collected elders and culture bearers from all of our regions and sat them down and came up with the 10 universal ones. And they all agreed that, yes, we all share these. When we look at our immersion classroom and we have one classroom that is immersion for 20 kids. It's Yup'ik immersion, Yugtun is the language.

We concentrate on the Yup'ik and Cup'ik values. And Cup'ik is a different dialect or a different subset of Yup'ik. They're able to understand each other pretty much. And we use both in our instruction here. The thing about Yup'ik values and Cup'ik values is in them, and I'm glad to hear the other speakers, and Dr. Sims talked about this earlier, and Joshua, is relationships. And within Yugtun, they have something called yu-yahak. And yu-yahak is the way to behave as a human being. And it identifies and explains basically, within the language, how your relationship is with family members, how your relationship sits with the community, and even beyond that, in the universe. So all the animals, all of our environment, and what they're getting at is balance. And they want balance and something -- In Yup'ik, they have a thing called slang-wak, which is the balance of the universe.

And so this balance is tremendously essential, and we know it is today too. But that's found in this -- It's embedded in the language. So I was really glad to hear other people talking about that. I think that's, again, something universal we share as indigenous people, our traditional values and the way of seeing things and doing things in our languages. And when we lose those, we then step further away from who we truly are. One of the things we've seen huge changes with our kids in the immersion room is behavior. Kids' behaviors have gone from sour to sweet.



And when we talk to the elders, when we talk to the teachers, it's all that because yu-yahak, and the way of being, and the language is teaching them this. We're hearing it from parents as well. And they're talking about this at home, and the different things that are happening and the positive things they're seeing happen.

The other thing that we do with our curriculum is we align it to the traditional seasonal cycles of our people. And what this allows us to do that connects our Head Start to the cycles of our families, so when I grew up, I went to school, my school was totally out of sync with what we were doing as a family and as a village. And there was always this disconnect. We grew up seeing school as something totally separate from our community, and that should not be happening. Our schools should be a reflection of our community. So that is one of our big pushes here what we're doing at Cook Inlet Native Head Start.

We've become an extension then as a family and/or really more importantly the village, and a way of life. And remember, for the Alaska native people living here in Anchorage, the majority of us have moved in from villages in the last 20, 30 years. So when we come together like this, we get comments from a lot of our families. In fact, this is so good, I feel like I'm back in the village it connects us with other native people. One of the problems in our community assessment was identified was that native families moving in here get disconnected from our culture and from each other because we live in a city. So we're able to do that with this program. We do have difficulties in balancing some of this stuff because if you look at Alaska, we stretch from Florida to California and from Texas to Minnesota, and so we're covering a huge geographical area. And so when we look at the seasonal cycles of our people, bird hunting for instance might not be the same in the Aleutians as it is in the Yukon Kuskokwim delta because our seasons are often different. So we aligned this as best we could and thinking also where we're at, how do we capitalize on these? So we focus on, these are the different tribal groups that are focusing on different subsistence cycles during the year, in our Yugtun immersion room, it's all Yup'ik, there's no focus on any other culture or any other language, it's only Yup'ik.

So our activities, for instance, in April would be based upon the values that are found within bird hunting, cooperation, family roles, etcetera, those would drive all of our activities, all of our culture coordinators, and culture bearers, and speakers, and storytellers, and dancers for young people and for the classrooms. What we are working on right now, and I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about this is language assessments. And we've had literate language. We have had literacy in Alaska since the 1700s for Unangax and Sugpiaq and some of the Southern Yup'ik people. It was with a Cyrillic alphabet during a Russian colonial period. We have, in my lifetime, now switched over to the Roman alphabet, our elders don't read it, they read the old alphabet. My generation can read both, but my children can only read the Roman alphabet form. So we're kind of in a transition stage, but in 1867 when they sold Alaska, 90 percent percent of the Unangax and Sugpiaq people were fluent in reading and writing in our own language. So literacy is not really brand new to many of our groups.

We're working on cultural are rubrics for our curriculum so that when we see children move and we're able to identify things, we can actually log it in here, we can collect samples or artifacts and show that, yes, this child is able to do this. And these are all aligned with the Office of Head Start's Early Learning framework. So we want to get to those standards, but we want to do it through an indigenous lens. Okay, I need to get moving to what we do with families and parents 'cause that's really the meat of this. And so I'm sorry I'm talking really fast, faster than my cultural pattern is supposed to allow me, but I know we're on a time limit. So I want to talk about those things that we do for parents. And these ones here are activities just for parents. You'll see the other ones we do too. We've done workshops, cultural workshops, like I'm going to show you

here. We've recently done some decolonizing activities, resiliency, and healing, and I think, those last three have really prompted a lot of our people, woken them up I guess, why we're in the state we're in. I've got people coming out of this thing saying, "I want to go into education now." I've got people coming, adults coming, "We're going to be more committed to our language." So those are really good things to help light the fire I guess or get the fire burning. So if you look at these, I'm just going to run through these we did Qayat, on the left side, there's kayak making, it's the model kayak making, and then coiled baskets, Kularavik, in the other one. And these are samples. So when we do this. We provide daycare for the families 'cause they've all got kids, and we do it in the evening, which is right after work hours, so we also provide food because moms don't want to go home and cook and then come over here.

So we do daycare, we provide meals. And then in these examples, we have a grass basket class that we were doing. And these run for several weeks. And then kayaking or making kayaks. The real cool thing that happened with this is our parents get connected to each other and they start building these relationships. And we're getting lots of positive comments. We want more of these. It's an opportunity to bring us together. We don't all live in one area of town, so it allows parents to connect and build those relationships, which only strengthens it. So the activities we do where we include kids and families in activity together is, for instance, we do dog sledding, which is one of our kids' favorite, favorite things. I'm losing my place there, sorry. These are just pictures of different events that we did dog sledding at. And then the other one we did years ago was we made kayak skin boat here. We had them made for -- Kayaks are made by size, so these are made for children in sizes. And we launched them at the Heritage Center, so we collaborated with the Alaska Native Heritage Center. They have a lake out there, it's a shallow lake. This was where parents came and helped their children, you'll see some of them in the water with their kid in rafts. There's one on the left putting his child in.

They came and kids got to paddle around in the lake. We had adults out there. You know, they're dangerous both. We've had outriggers put on them. But the idea was let's get our kids charged into this. This is what our grandparents used to do at this age. So let's plug our kid into it, and we're hoping that it engages kids and keep them on, well, a native path in the future. So here you see some parents showing their kids how to paddle. And then this man is putting his little girl in the boat and there she goes, she's getting launched. There's another one where Mom's watching onshore, Dad's teaching how to balance in the water. So these events are really cool because we use native language in them, and it's for families. So it really gives us the opportunity to utilize something real, not sitting in a classroom, but getting out in nature where our language is from. So I think that's, again, really important. Another thing we do in our big -- We also do a big family nights. And we do four a year, and Christmas is probably one of our biggest ones in that, Christmas family night, our people are very interested in other indigenous cultures from around the Pacific or anywhere in the world, and in this one, we have Hmong dancers and Polynesian dancers because our people are just really fascinated with other types of dancing. We also include of course Santa Claus and then traditional dancing from Alaska.

And we have a whole bunch of different styles of that as well. So it's a long night, we feed them, we provide food, we always have native dancers, and our collaborative partners are usually part of that, sometimes setting up booths and different things. One of our biggest events that brings in our Yup'ik speaking families is every month we do a Yugtun family night. This one we do in collaboration with Clare Swan Early Learning Center. And in fact, I think, Isti online there. She does a fantastic job of bringing both of our programs together. Clare Swan has the zero to three immersion, we have three to five year old Yup'ik immersions. And so together, we're able to do these really awesome Yup'ik nights where we have, always, we have feasting in Alaska, well, I think all over Indian countries, you got to have food, if we're going to have people. We have a

storytelling and lessons, and then we always have an elder present, and then we're always doing an activity. And I'll go through this and you can see, we'll talk about some of the activities here. It's one of the elders, she's teaching on the right-hand side, she's teaching dance motions. In the left, she's helping a child make a dance fan.

So the activity on that night was a dance fan. This is a different night, so a lots of feasting and food. Again, there's the fans being worked on. And then this night was making drums. And Isti both the drums and the fans. And Isti, you are awesome, thank you. This was such an awesome event. There was one little guy that made his drum and he packed it around with him day and night for weeks. At every event, he had his drum. And I just love this little girl's drum right there. It's got her family on there. Her mom is in the background. I was talking to her in Yup'ik the other day and I asked her, she responded and I told her mother, I said, "You must be really proud of her." And her mom smiled and said, "Well, yes I am." She then said her grandparents are even more proud. They can talk to her now," And it just brought tears to my eyes, it's like we're amending that gap that happened with our people and the loss of our language. The other thing that we do is Isti is always bringing in items to raffle off to our family, so that's the way to get them there. We do gas cards to raffle. We've done handheld CDs, DHSs. We have also these items right here called Uluak, which is a woman's knife. They are hot item by the ladies, and even though we live a modern life, our ladies still prefer using those knives. I guess about my time is up, so I want to talk a little bit our collaborators, Clare Swan, Early Head Start. We started 2015, they started shortly after that and did zero to three immersion. Together, we collaborate on immersion training, on curriculum, and assessment, on activities for families and student materials. We also, and I think these collaborations are really important, folks, if you can get out there and do that, it's going to strengthen your program.

We also collaborate with the University of Alaska Anchorage Early Childhood and Education Department. And they create student resources. So one of the recent things they created was the feelings book, which was just a beautiful book about our kids. And it's all in Yup'ik, but it our children and their different feelings, the kid's eating it up. And then parent resources as well as Facebook and YouTube soundbites for parents to help understand. And now I think both of us are pretty proud because the school district here was always slow on doing native language or reluctant. They've got everybody else's language but our languages. And now, because of our push from zero through five and the immersion, ASD now is starting up a kindergarten immersion K through 3, they're calling it immersion, but it's actually a dual language program for next year, which I'm just glad to see that movement happening. I think just the last -- Some of the amazing stuff that I've seen with these little guys is I saw a couple of things and hearing from different parents, one of them that I observed was a parent came to pick their child up and was speaking in English, "Okay, come on. Let's go get ready." And the little child turned to him and with a scolding finger in front of the dad's face went [Speaking tribal language] Meaning, telling him, "No, no, no! Speak in Yup'ik."

So I think our kids are advocating for us now and turning this thing around. I think I love hearing parents tell me, "Oh, my son coming home and my moving lips so I speak right and talk Yup'ik right." I just wanted to end at this last picture because, when I grew up it was, many of us were ashamed of our culture and we weren't fit in the Western society. I just love this little picture because this is our future. It's okay to be Yup'ik and to be a doctor and be on the phone. She's got a little traditional headdress on there. [Speaking tribal language] I don't have anything else, I don't think so.

Joshua: Thank you so much, Ethan. And thank you, Brooke. Thank you, Brooke, for your really wonderful rich presentation, so generous of you both to give us so much of your time today and

preparing together and for sharing with us the wonderful and really encouraging work that you both are doing. We have had a really exciting animated chat going on. And so now we've saved time to respond to some of the comments in the chat and also to bring back Howard and Lana from last time who also gave us beautiful presentations about their work, Howard in Cherokee Nation and Lana at the Jemez Pueblo. So Howard and Lana, come back in to give us their thoughts about what we heard today, as well as Mike Richardson and Dr. Christine Sims. I don't know who want to go first. There's certainly a lot to respond to.

Lana: This is Lana. I really just love what Ethan said about the children advocating, and that sounds beautiful 'cause we see that here too. We see our children, you know, getting upset when parents use English. And I think when you can change children's attitude and then it starts to affect the families -- We're doing something right. So that's a beautiful story. Thank you so much, Ethan, for sharing your story.

Ethan: Thank you too, Lana, for your presentation last week.

Howard: This is Howard, by the way. Ethan, I really, really enjoyed what you had to talk about, well, some of our values. And I know that's something that we had discussed, you know, prior to the webinar. But it's so, so true that -- There's values in our language that cannot be articulated in any other way. And having three children in the immersion school myself and how they behave, how they act. When I start to talk to them, I start talking about [Speaking tribal language] Is one of our words that we would tell one another, that the value systems of how we're supposed to be as humans, just talk what you're talking about, what you said. And so, you know, you don't really notice it until you get around mainstream children that realize, "Wow, it's obvious that everybody around us has a different value system than what my kids have." And it has to be contributed to our language, and that's the purity of it because when everything falls apart, purity always stands. And there's a line that is so pure that nobody could argue. And that exists within our languages. And I think that's something that our creator gave to us. [Speaking tribal language]

Ethan: I was just going through some of the questions there, and I was looking about, There was, I think, some discussion on non speakers getting into the classroom. We allow the children -- Many of our kids are coming in as English speakers. We're hoping as time goes on, the zero to three that we get from the immersion, Clare Swan will be three-year-old fluent level children. Right now we're working with four and five year olds that are in essence babies to our languages. So they're allowed to ask the teacher questions in English, once the teacher knows they know how to do it Yup'ik , then our teachers will requests them to say it in Yugtun. And adults though, when they come into the classroom, you can't speak in English, the teachers won't allow it. If you have to talk to the teacher, you have to whisper in their ear or ask them to step out of the classroom. And they've been really good at holding that kind of a reversal of how when our parents went to school.

Dr. Sims: And I think that's the same principle that Lana and her staff use in their immersion Head Start. Isn't that right, Lana?

Lana: Yes, it is. We also ask our -- We designed our back offices and my offices in area where families can -- If they have concerns and stuff, can share them in English. But in the classrooms, we ask them to step aside, step outside, or step out in the hall, or like I said come into our offices. And we've had some great responses too. We've had great support with that. And I think the main thing is we've always stressed that it's to protect our language. English is not the one that's in danger, our language is. And so when you come across as, you know, it's always just explaining I think and educating, informing, and just really being accountable to your parent I

think. You know, you get their support when you share everything. And I think that's so very true that the communication with the parents on why, you know, you use certain strategies for teaching the language is especially important because, you know, without that parents, can very easily not understand why, you know, you have, you know, if not speak in English, you know, in the immersion environment, so that communication piece is really important. And I think once parents understand the reasoning behind, they're very much, you know, open and flexible to, you know, supporting those causes because they know it's not a process of shutting them out, it's really to make sure that the children continue to have that support in the native language. So there are positive ways to explain that, so I'm glad to hear both you and Ethan implementing those in your school.

Joshua: I'm glad to hear you talk about that 'cause it is so important and there are those bumps that parents come up against like the silence period. Dr. Sims will talk about that in a minute, but also for us, the big language warriors, I think, that Howard referred to all of us as earlier, can you also address the colonization that's happened with our people and us having to even fight within our own community's attitudes that have been molded from the Western education system that devalue our language and ways to turn that around, and again, education for our parents?

Lana: And this is a legacy, you know, from decades and hundreds of years, centuries of just kind of chopped down outside position of just another language. And so it's not easily undone. And so there has to be also that work helping our community, talking to our parents, even how can our elders understand why we have now come to a different point in time where we have to rethink, you know, what is the value of our language, and has that value, you know, always been there? Yes, it has, but it's been a lot of -- Been at the detriment of external forces, you know, that have often made us think that our languages don't have the same prestige as English or somehow an oral language doesn't have the same prestige as a written language. So all those kinds of understandings about language are really crucial. And I'm happy to hear that, Ethan, you're actually spending some time to unravel and unwrap those kinds of things in your parent sessions.

Ethan: Yeah, I think we have to do it in order for us to understand. I mean, I have families with parents who don't understand what's happened to us. They don't, I mean, they really don't understand why we're not speaking their language anymore. They think it was a conscious choice that we made. And so they need to realize this stuff. I also think they need to know what we stand to lose once our last speaker is gone, and that's a tremendous amount of knowledge and connection to our homeland and ourselves.

Lana: I agree.

Howard: That's exactly true, Ethan. I watched your presentation, man. You could almost say the exact same thing were some of the battles that we're having. And I think it's across the board. Some of the biggest fights are internal. And a lot of them is, they believe that there is a -- You know, I had a gentleman here today that used to speak to the child who doesn't speak now is like, well, I dropped it and, you know, I guess I made that decision myself and was then talking to him just a few minutes you found out that a teacher would not let him play outside because you didn't speak English. So he had to sit inside and watch the other kids play, you know, for two years, he stopped speaking his native tongue. But there is a lot of healing that has to happen, but if we do lose our last speaker, the knowledge and understanding, it's a totally different world view of how the existence of the universe works. And without that, I fear not only for our people but I fear for the world because we've had thousands of languages for thousands of years now, and that's what has brought us to this point, and the depletion of that is very scary.

Joshua: Thank you, Howard. I think that's so, so accurate. And, you know, I mean, we know this, other languages have a homeland to go to and a place to go, most of them have a thriving language, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese. This is our home, we have nowhere else to go when our language dies. This is it.

Mike: This is Mike Richardson. You know, I'm so blessed to work with all these wonderful people. And I get to see all their programs and all the work that they're doing. And I want to say that and, you know, I like you guys to kind of address to how this improves behavior when our children are involved in these emerging processes. From what I've seen going out to Brook's program, going out to the Lana's program, and in just the conversations I've had along with Ethan's program as well as other programs that have full immersion and in the work that Howard is doing and how it's impacting his community, you know, I see an improvement in behavior. And I know with Brooke's programs especially because they have immersion school along one side of the school and the public school on the other side, I can walk down the hallway and tell everybody in the immersion school, just not from hearing them speaking the Ojibwe language but just from the way they carry themselves. So that behavior at the end of how. You talked about how it has impacted and change you as a person from all the work that you are doing, and then the rest of you that are working with our young children, how that thing, and I've seen, Brooke, at your program where even for special needs children, there's an inclusiveness there that we just don't see in other classrooms if you guys could address that and how that impacts the families and the community.

Dr. Sims: I think what you're alluding to, Mike, is indeed what we do see very many times, I've seen in the full immersion program in Jemez but also even in immersion classes that, you know, may be offered in older age groups. And there's something about our languages in terms of how they're used, and while all the languages that we have are different, I think it really -- I mean I'm convinced that that language, our languages, all convey in some way these relationships that we have with other speakers from that same community. And even such simple things as learning how you address somebody in terms of greeting them -- When people begin to understand, "Oh, this is how you this." Or even things like who speaks first, if the younger person speaks first to an older person or do they wait for the older person to address them first. I mean, if those kinds of relationship between speakers and the community that have almost built into them, you could say, this element of respect. And when children begin to understand that, there is something and a difference in how they not only communicate and use that but then also in their behavior that goes with it. Just very quickly, you know, one quick example, in Lac Courte we had a language immersion class going on, we told kids from the very start, you know, all of you in this room are related in some way and we don't have words for kinship terms like cousin or aunty or uncle, somebody's going to either be your brother or your sister or your grandma or your grandpa or your mother or your father, and so even the kinship terms we use also, I think, reflect some of those basic relationships that we have in our languages.

Joshua: Thank you, Dr. Sims. And I agree with it so much.

Joshua: Go ahead, Lana. I'm sorry.

Lana: Sorry. This is Lana. I know that once our teachers really started to -- This was a few years back when they just really started even to like, in the discipline area, kind of talking to them, they said it was like, they were so shocked, like we cannot believe, like a lot of children's behaviors just changed entirely, even things like tattling and those kinds of things just stopped, and it was just amazing and our teachers were so -- They couldn't believe that they didn't do it sooner. But this was, like I said, at the beginning of our immersion. Dr.

Simms: I wanted just to ask a quick question. Brooke, if you can hear me. Brooke, you also mentioned -- Well, both actually, both you and Ethan mentioned the critical role that your cultural teaching also plays in children learning your languages. And I believe, Ethan, it was you that said something about, it's not only relationships among human beings but relationships with our environment, nature. And aren't those also expressed in certain ways in our languages as well? How you, perhaps, even approach the natural resources that we gather for our subsistence? Aren't those also relationships that are reflected in how we address nature? I just wanted to ask you, Brooke and Ethan, for your thoughts on that.

Ethan: This is Ethan, Dr. Sims, and yeah, I talked about it a little earlier, but you pick called the slang walk or the balance and maybe we can look at that in our own personal life of balance, and then in family, but it's even bigger than just human relationships because we are so part of this environment. I mean, even in the language, it's embedded on how you react with the animal world when you take game or you kill things, what are your responses supposed to be, like in my village, when you take land animals, when we're done, the bones were always thrown into the ocean because land animals love that salt, and the belief is then that spirit is reincarnated and will provide for your family in the future. As a hunter, you've done all the protocols and cared for them. So yeah, it's tremendously important in how we interact with their environment and really in the Yup'ik sense with the universe around you, and it shows you that you're a part of this and you are a part of this whole balance and that the language is keeping that balance. I mean, it's really the holder of it. Brooke?

Brooke: Yeah, I would -- I mean the thing that we are trying to learn and relearn and teach to our students is that, like, the way that we're taught about our language is that it actually, from our origin stories, it's actually the language of the spirits of the earth, the sky, so it's their language that they borrowed to us, and the story is that, you know, the creation was done but all the little baby animals, they didn't know where they belong. So the spirits gave every animal a sound so that all the babies could find their mom, they'd know who their mom was by the sound, so they could return and be part of their own family, in their own environment. At the end is like casting out all the sounds, they didn't have any left, so the money dudes got together and they were like, "Well, let's just borrow them ours so they'll have some way to stay together, but they'll always be able to talk to us to." Like for us, this is a borrowed language, so whenever we're talking, we say that -- Like they can understand us and they hear us, and so every one of those plants, animals, all that gathering -- They have a spirit also that needs to be address so that they know what we intend to do with like their bodies or their parts, so we have to make sure they know. So that just all part of establishing relationships all around with everybody that we believe occupies the space. So that, like, if they don't know that and people don't know that, then they don't know why the language is important also.

Mike: Dr. Sims, I'm having a hard time not wanting to jump in here.

Dr. Sims: Okay. [Laughter] Go ahead. You can go.

Mike: You know, they're right. I mean, that's exactly what's going on. I was on a panel here a while back about, you know, children respecting one another, but why is there the level of one child respecting another, if that is the line in the sand, then we have really failed because we're supposed to -- In our culture, we're supposed to teach our kids when they're gathering stuff and they're gathering medicine or that sort of thing, they can't gather the first one that they see, depending on the sacredness of that plant. You know, they have to count to the fourth one. And if there's only three, you know, and sometimes they have to count the seventh one to gather that special medicine. And they have to lay something down at the -- And then they have to ask the creator if they can borrow that and if the plant's fine with that. And then there's a prayer that you

have to do to do that. Same as if you kill a deer or anything like that, that you pray over that deer afterwards, you know, and you thank god and that deer, you know, for allowing the animal to feed your family. The water, you can't put bodily fluids and that sort of stuff in the water, that's disrespectful to the water. You can't put water on top of fire. There's all these different things of how to respect that. So if you're respecting the plants and you're respecting the animals, and you're respecting the water, and you're respecting the fire, if we go around a ceremonial fire, we have to go counterclockwise, so all the stuff about respect, by the time you get to humans, when they tell us to treat humans as sacred, then that a given. The line isn't drawn in the sand next to the human, it's drawn in the sand way far back with nature. So respect is automatic at that point.

Joshua: Thank you, Mike.

Emily: This is Emily again.

Joshua: Hi, Emily. Sorry, I just wanted to go ahead and let everybody know about a couple of resources that we have. First of all, I'm going to come back to the slide so you can click on it. But these are some news stories that were done in Alaska about language revitalization of the Yup'ik language. So it's a lot of what Ethan was talking about, and they're wonderful. I encourage you to check them out. And then also know that the Office of Head Start has a resource called Making It Work. That's another one that you can check out, and go ahead, Josh.

Joshua: I just wanted to thank all of you who have joined us today and to thank our wonderful speakers and panelists. This has been such a gift and wisdom that the planet needs. So thank you, and thank you for your time and the gift of your wisdom.