

Additional Resources:

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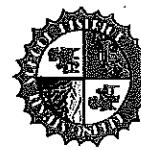
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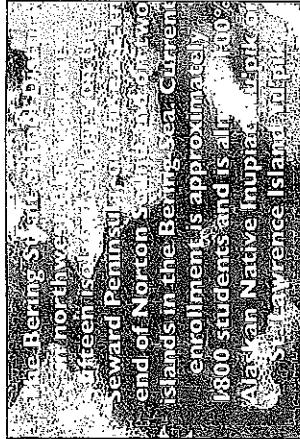
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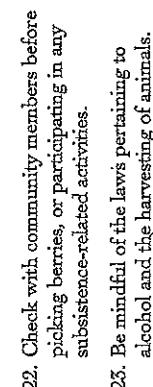
When working in the Bering Strait School District, you will quickly learn that there is a richness of Alaska Native culture here. Three varying cultural groups and languages (each with multiple dialects) are represented across our district's fifteen villages. Each village varies in the degree to which traditional practices are in place, but you will find an abundance of practices specific to the people of each area everywhere you go.

Welcome to the Bering Strait School District! We are glad you are here. The purpose of this publication is to familiarize our new employees to our local cultures and provide hints that will hopefully help you feel comfortable in your new village.

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20. Humor is one of the cultural values. It is important to appreciate the playful teasing that often occurs within village relationships. Being able to laugh at oneself and one's shortcomings are desirable traits. This kind of teasing is not a put down or a form of bullying. In many villages there is a term called teasing cousins and they banter publicly and good-heartedly.
21. Elders are respected within Alaska Native cultures. Invite them into your class or include them in class happenings. They can provide cultural and historical aspects of life in the village.
22. Check with community members before picking berries, or participating in any subsistence-related activities.
23. Be mindful of the laws pertaining to alcohol and the harvesting of animals.



**HINTS TO WORKING IN THE
BERING STRAIT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

1. Educators must be able to connect with students and their families. We need to develop these relationships. You need to remember that you are a long line of "outsiders" who have come to their village. Because of the factor that most teachers eventually leave the village, villagers may have the feeling that you are in their village for a short time. Think about how much effort you would put into a friendship if you knew they were going to leave.
2. Get to know people as soon as you can. It is important for you to form healthy relationships with Native people. Once you do, you will start enjoying the rich experience of living in a Native village. Make a concerted effort to make contact with people who are good role models for their village. Trips to the store or post office can be enjoyable because people will want to meet you. Remember: A genuine smile goes a long way.
3. Remember that the villages are very small and news travels fast. A good idea is to constantly think that your words and actions are being video taped. Choose your words and actions carefully. Be careful not to be loud and draw attention to yourself. These are contrary to traditional values.
4. Let people know your boundaries. Don't lend any money that you don't want back. Establish reasonable times for people to come and visit you at home.
5. Participate in village activities and ceremonies. Regularly attending funerals, dances, basketball games, etc. are important for the non-Native person living in a Native community. Such behavior not only conveys respect but an attempt to participate.
6. Maintain neutrality in the village. Openly siding with one community group against another will decrease your ability to work in the community. Remember you are living in a small village. When someone tells you something negative about another person, it is best to acknowledge what the person is saying, but not in a way that implies agreement. People know who you visit and when. Spread the wealth of your visits around. Everyone will benefit.
7. Make an effort to learn the local language. It is no secret that Inupiaq, Yupik and St. Lawrence Island Yupik, the Native languages spoken in the Bering Strait School District, are difficult for western people to learn. You may never speak a Native language fluently, but making an attempt to learn the language conveys a sense of respect and honor to the culture.
8. Communication is important. Remember that not all communication is verbal. Some forms of nonverbal communication involve the lifting of one's eye brows to mean yes, crinkling of the nose to mean no, shoulder shrugs to mean I don't know or I don't care, and smiles are used as a universal greeting. Hands on one's hips and finger wagging may be considered insulting to Native people.
- When speaking, be mindful of your intonation. Know your audience and know which tone of voice to use. Students will learn more if a friendly voice is used in instruction as opposed to an authoritative one. Slow down when you are talking. Remember that students may be silently translating your English into their language so they can understand you. Increasing your wait time, when questioning, is extremely important. Remember that wait increases cognition for all students.
9. Lack of eye contact does not mean disrespect.

10. "Community English" may be spoken by your students and parents. It is acceptable for communicating, but remember in your teaching use "academic English." Teachers are responsible for helping students understand the purposes of communication--Talking, listening reading and writing appropriate to the context.
11. Watch the attitude! Thoughts such as, "They don't care" or "This village is bad" are not helpful. Remember: your job is to create conditions of learning for your students.
12. Model appropriate behavior. Remember that everyone will look at how you respond during stressful situations. Showing anger and frustration is counterproductive. Calmness, patience and tolerance are important during tough times.
13. Educators are mandatory reporters of sexual abuse and neglect. This can cause conflict and an awkward situation because we may have to report village leaders. If one needs to do this, previously close relationships with village members will abruptly change and become aloof. Be strong, and remember that you are required by law to make such reports.
14. People don't care what college or university you went to or what degrees you have. Your behavior toward others is what counts. Bragging and/or boasting about oneself are not culturally relevant in the village. Show interest in learning about the new culture. Listen more---Talk less!
15. Appreciate the uniqueness of your village. The circle of life is never more evident when the snow flies in October or the ice melts in May. The flurry of activities changes with each season. Get involved and learn about this rich lifestyle in the village. Fishing, hunting, snow machining, boating and berry picking are all wonderful activities to do. Consider incorporating some of these in your class activities.

16. Learn who the leadership of the village is; for instance, the village council president, Advisory Education Committee (AEC), mayor, pastor, the local flight service agents, post master, store clerks, Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO), Village Police Officer (VPO), health aids, etc.



17. People may come to visit you at your classroom or at your house at unscheduled times. Taking the time to talk is often better than telling people that you are busy. It is important to make time to create working relationships and important contacts within the village.
18. One of the cultural values in a village is sharing. It is expected that a first-time successful hunter give their whole animal to an elder. In the same token, you may be invited to try Alaska Native traditional foods. This could be whale, walrus, seal, caribou or greens in seal oil. Trying these foods will add to your experience in the village. If you are a vegetarian or have diet restrictions, tell your host and they will understand.
19. It is district policy that if you are traveling by air in the winter, you wear appropriate clothing. This means coveralls, winter boots, a hat and gloves. One never knows when an airplane may unexpectedly land on the ice or tundra in an emergency.