20. Hunter 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.

Additional Resources:


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.

Brevig Little Mission
St. Michael
Elim
Savoonga
Teller
Gamzhal
Shaktoolik
Unalakleet
Golovin
Shishmaref
Wales
Koyuk
Sterling
White Mountain

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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.

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 Naive village.

3. Remember that the villages are very small and news travels fast. A good idea is to
constantly think about the people you are connected with. Choose your words
and actions carefully. Be careful not to be loud and draw attention to yourself.

4. Let people know your boundaries. Don’t lend 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 attend funerals,
dances, basketball games, etc. are important for the non-Native person living in a Naive
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.

7. Make an effort to learn the local language. It is no secret that Inupiaq, Yupik and St. Lawrence Island
is vertical for western people to learn. You may never speak a Naive 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 eyes 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 universal
gestures. Hands on one’s hips and finger wagging may be considered insulting to Native people.

9. 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.

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
fear is counterproductive. Calmness,
patience and tolerance are important during rough 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
got to or what degree 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 the 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. Be flexible. 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 older. 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. Tasting 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, you wear appropriate
clothing. This means overcoats, winter boots,
a hat and gloves. One never knows when an
airplane may unexpectedly land on the ice or
tundra in an emergency.