

Bridging to the Future Framework

How Alaska's Schools Can Help Students Prepare for Life After High School

The Bridging Framework is a tool to understand where, when & how students receive support to prepare for the future. Students have better postsecondary outcomes when they have access to **systemic** and **holistic** planning throughout their school careers. Schools can use this tool as a guide to inventory and enhance the spectrum of support for students.

Systemic

Students are prepared for life after high school when they receive consistent and ongoing guidance from late elementary through the end of high school. And it works best when the messages are reinforced in a variety of settings:

Advisory: Career counseling & personal plans

Families: Conversations with parents, aunties, uncles, etc.

Classroom: Teacher-led, curriculum connected to the real world

Community: Opportunities with employers and Tribes

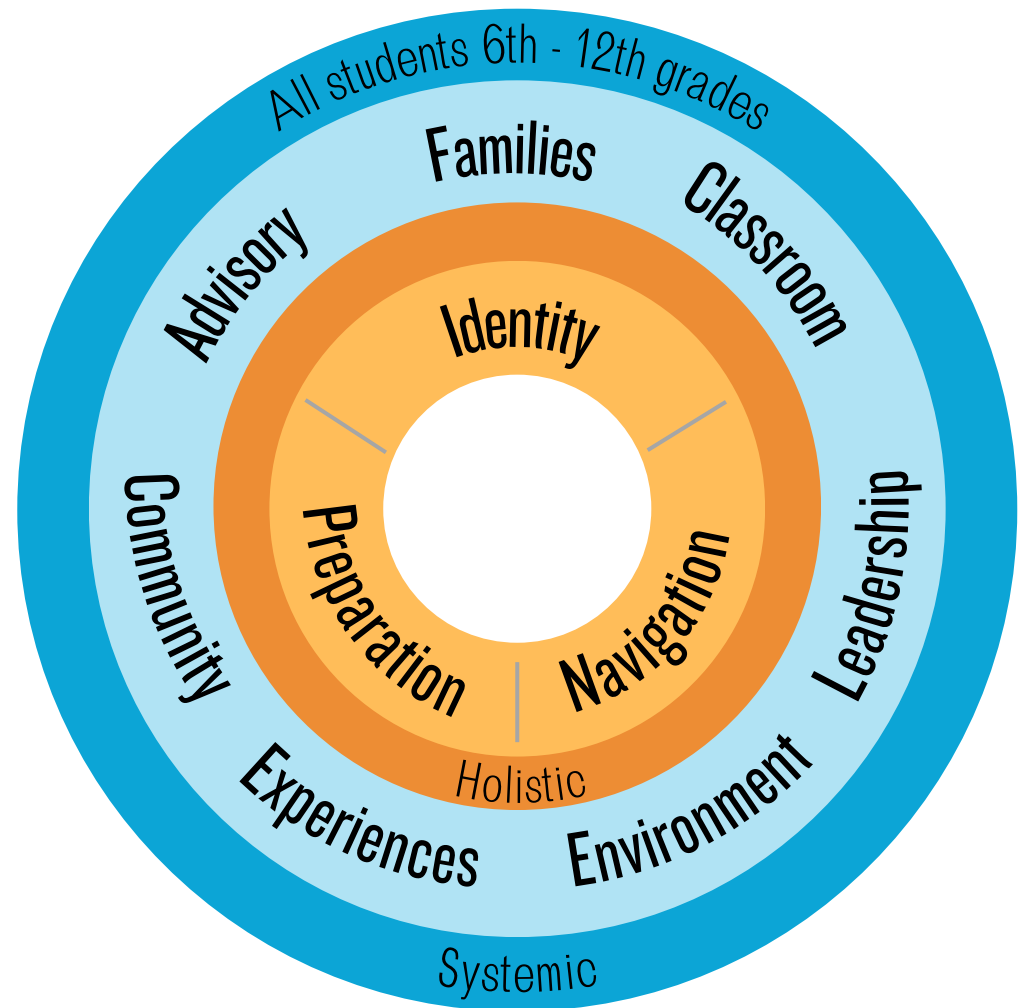
Experiences: Hands-on projects, internships, dual enrollment

Environment: School-based messages and near-peer examples

Leadership: School leaders setting goals & monitoring progress

Holistic

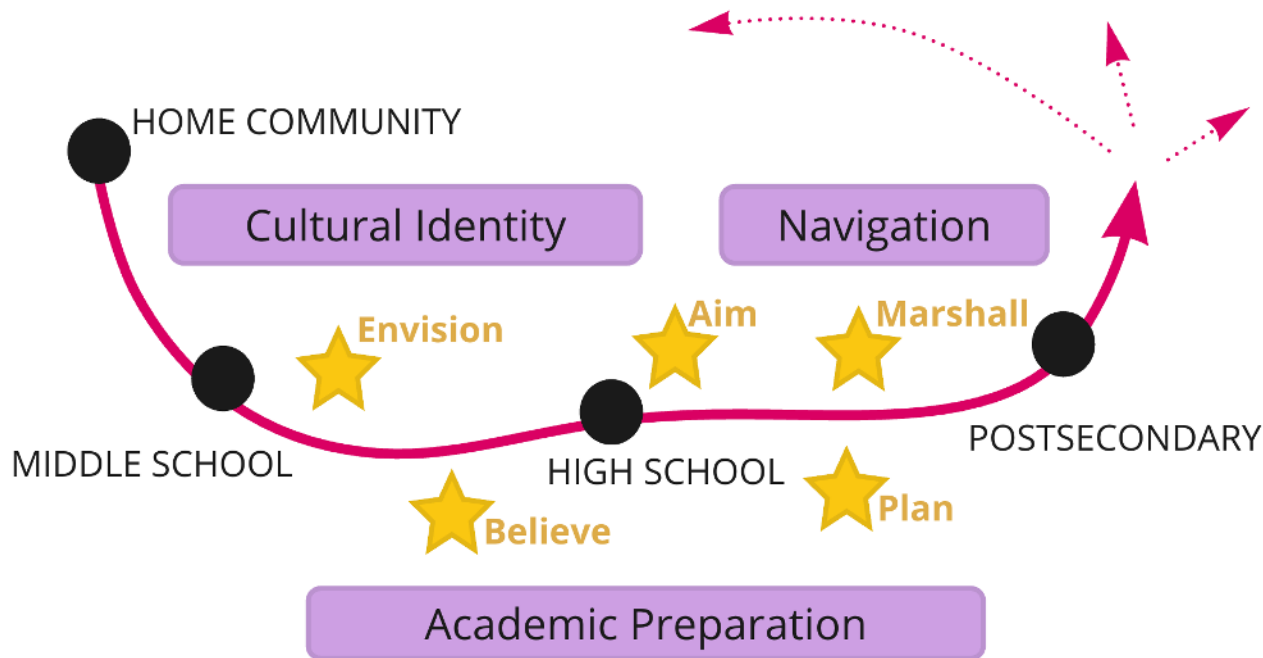
Research finds that students who know who they are and why they are pursuing a goal like a certificate or a college degree are much more likely to achieve that goal. Schools can help students prepare for life after high school by fostering **academic preparation, postsecondary and life navigation skills, and cultural and self identity.**



Bridging to the Future Framework

A New Map for Alaskan Students



The right experiences at the right time can help students prepare for the next step in their journey. A student has to envision a future before they can achieve it. And a student who knows who they are, where they are from, and has built confidence through past experiences is better positioned to achieve their goals. This map illustrates a suggested sequence of support so that it is systemic and holistic. See the Background section for more on how the Framework was developed.



Preparing for life after high school is like running a race. Students need preparation, practice and to know where the finish line is. The trail may be different for each student, but all students can benefit from signposts, arrows, aid stations, practice sessions, coaches, cheerleaders, and a supportive team.

Rethinking Readiness Framework, Janelle Vanasse *Ready, Willing & Able Developmental Framework, Mandy Savitz-Romer & Suzanne Bouffard*

Bridging to the Future Inventory

	Advisory Counselors, Teachers	Classroom Teachers, Embedded	Family Aunties, Uncles	Environment Walls & Halls, Near Peers	Experience Internship, Dual enroll	Community Tribes, Employers	Leadership School Admin & Boards
Areas of Strength 							
Areas of Growth 							

Preparing students academically	(Not yet)	1	2	3	4	5 (We got this)
Providing navigation skills	(Not yet)	1	2	3	4	5 (We got this)
Fostering cultural identity	(Not yet)	1	2	3	4	5 (We got this)

Bridging to the Future Inventory

The Inventory is a tool that schools and communities can use to identify current strengths and opportunities for growth.

Tips for Using the Inventory

- Gather a team with a variety of perspectives (school leaders, teachers, families, students, employers, Tribal members, etc.).
- Consider the programs, policies, and practices that help students in your school or community prepare for life after high school.
- Reflect on areas of strength.
 - What is going well?
 - What do you want to keep doing?
- Reflect on opportunities for growth.
 - Who are you *not* reaching? Who is underrepresented in programs or outcomes?
 - Where else can you foster support for students? Are there strategies in place for all locations & grade levels?
 - How well do the strategies promote academic preparation, navigation skills, AND cultural identity?

Taking it Further

- Consider how the team's findings can be linked to other school improvement initiatives like family partnership, culturally responsive teaching, or social & emotional learning. (Hint: they are all connected!)
- Assess your cultural competency with the tools available at [Rethinking Readiness](#).

Data to Consider

Before diving into the conversation, you may want to take a look at the data for your school or district.

Sources of information include:

- **Your families, students & community members.** Family dialogues and focus groups with students can provide insights that may be hard to capture in numbers.
- **Postsecondary enrollment rates.** Summaries for each school are provided in the Alaska Department of Education's [Report Card to the Public](#). In-depth reports, including postsecondary completion rates, are available from the [National Student Clearinghouse](#).
- **Financial aid completion rates.** [Form Your Future](#) tracks real-time Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates by high school. The [Alaska Performance Scholarship](#) annual report also provides school district-level data.
- **Surveys.** The [Alaska School Climate & Connectedness Survey](#) asks middle & high school students & their families about their plans to get more education after high school.

Cultural Identity

Students with a strong cultural identity have a sense of self grounded in their own cultural background, (Vanasse, 2021) Indigenous identity consists of multiple elements, including identification (e.g., tribe, self-perception), connection (e.g., kinship, ancestors, and land), and culture/spirituality (e.g., language, values, worldview, and practices) (Buckingham, 2021).

All students have an identity that impacts their goals. Research consistently finds that a strong sense of cultural identity promotes academic success, mental health, and contributes to overall well-being.

Hallmarks of Culturally Affirming Career Guidance

Build on traditional knowledge & values

Alequutet, Ineruutet, Piciryarat

Reflect local / community values

Build on life lessons, traditional teachings & values from elders

Ask about/write about your culture

Incorporate cultural ways of learning & teaching

Learn by doing / observing

Include experiences: local, sports, programs

Build trusting relationships

Learn as a community

Make it creative: storytelling, song & humor

Approach students with unconditional regard

Be compassionate & caring

Take a strengths-based approach

Be patient & open-hearted

Practice lateral kindness

Instruct in a loving way

Let students know:

Make it personalized & holistic

Plan for well-being & lifestyle

Create space to explore values & connect to future dreams

Customize

Foster a growth-mindset

Cultivate cultural identity as a strength

Cultivate cultural humility

Be aware of your own culture, assumptions & expectation of “success”

Refrain from judgement

Have curiosity

Be flexibility

Listen & respect needs

These hallmarks were identified during a convening of elders and career guide at Alaska Pacific University in 2023.

Tips & Tools for Creating a Culturally Affirming Environment

Partner to integrate home knowledge and ways of knowing.

- ✂ Local Tribes, cultural organizations, & families
- ✂ Stronger Together Family Partnership Framework

Implement programs & curriculum that encourage students & families to explore their cultural identity.

- ✂ Alaska Cultural Identity Project
- ✂ Finding Your Future Family Workshop

Assess the school culture for opportunities to increase culturally affirming approaches.

- ✂ Rethinking Readiness for Alaska Native students
- ✂ Alaska Cultural Standards

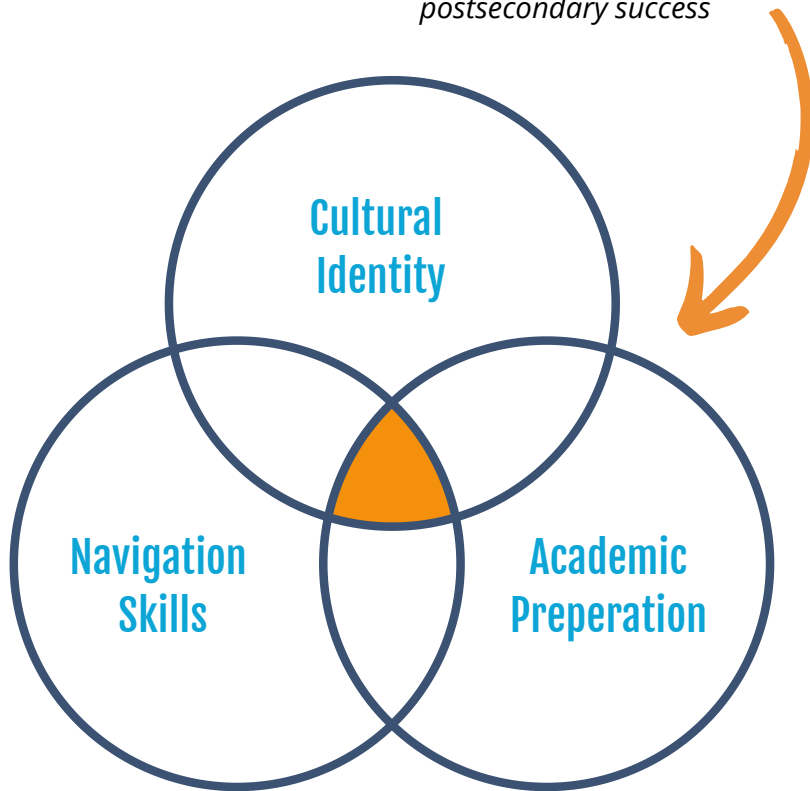
Academic Preparation

When schools have high expectations they provide students with a solid academic foundation. Rigorous and meaningful course work also helps students build the confidence they need to take on new challenges after high school.

Navigation Skills

Navigation skills include knowing how and when to apply for internships, jobs, training programs and college. Navigation skills also include how to finance postsecondary education, from applying for financial aid to managing personal finances. These skills also include when to ask for help and how to advocate for oneself.

Fostering all 3 factors is the key to postsecondary success



Tips & Tools to Promote Preparation & Navigation

In addition to rigorous and meaningful coursework, schools can provide access to dual enrollment courses & early exposure experiences. Examples include:

- ✂ University of Alaska's [Alaska Advantage](#)
- ✂ Alaska Pacific University's [Early Honors program](#)
- ✂ Bristol Bay Region [Career & Technical Education](#)

Explicitly teach navigation skills & help students make a personal plan. Free resources include:

- ✂ [Native Pathways to College Guidebook](#)
- ✂ [Alaska Career Information System \(AKCIS\)](#)

Support families & students in accessing financial aid:

- ✂ Align course offerings with [Alaska Performance Scholarship](#) eligibility criteria & inform students & families early & often
- ✂ Provide [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) completion support
- ✂ Share [scholarship opportunities](#) with older students.
- ✂ Help families with younger students save for education after high school with programs like [Alaska 529](#)

Bridging to the Future: Background

How the Bridging Framework was Developed

The Framework builds on *Becoming Aware: Rethinking College Readiness for Alaska Native Students*, an initiative developed by Janelle Vanasse, which emphasizes the importance of fostering academic preparation, navigation skills, and cultural identity. And it draws from *Ready, Willing & Able: A Developmental Approach to College Readiness* by Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne Bouffard which outlines the process of supporting students to envision, believe, aim, plan, and marshal the resources needed to transition to postsecondary opportunities.

Members of the Southeast Network of the Alaska Postsecondary Completion and Access Network (Alaska CAN) worked together to develop the framework based on insights from students, school staff, and Alaska Native serving organizations.

This document was compiled by the AASB with deep gratitude to the individuals & organizations who contributed, including:

- Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education
- Alaska Humanities Forum
- Alaska Pacific University
- Chatham School District
- Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribe of Alaska
- Hoonah City School District
- Hydaburg City School District
- Goldbelt Heritage Institute
- Juneau School District
- Mt. Edgecumbe High School
- Sealaska Corporation
- Sealaska Heritage Institute
- SERRC
- Sitka School District
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- University of Alaska Southeast
- Yakutat School District



For more info contact Emily Ferry,
eferry@aasb.org, 907 463-1660

This Framework was developed under grant U215N170038-21 from the Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and readers should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Recommended Reading

Carlson, Dannielle. Identifying & Lessening Barriers for Alaska Native Students Pursuing Postsecondary Education; A guide for Educators, 2022.

John-Sheilds, Agatha. "Tangerqungiaraucaraq (Being Present)," 2018.

Mercuiliief, Ilarion (Larry) and Rodrick, Libby. Stop Talking; Indigenous Ways of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and Difficult Dialogues. Anchorage, AK: University of Alaska Press, 2013.

Perna, Mark. *Answering Why: Unleashing Passion, Purpose, & Performance in Younger Generations*. Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2018.

Savitz-Romer, Mandy and Bouffard, Suzanne. *Ready, Willing & Able; A Developmental Approach to College Readiness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012.

Vanasse, Janelle. "Becoming Aware; Rethinking College Readiness for Alaska Native Students," 2020.