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Lake and Peninsula School Board
PO 498
King Salmon, AK 99613

Dear Lake and Peninsula School Board:

I am writing to you today to encourage the Lake and Peninsula School District and Board to make Indigenous language learning in the classrooms a priority.

The year 2022 began the "International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022 – 2032)". According to the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#), optimistic estimates suggest that at least 50 percent of today's spoken languages will be extinct or seriously endangered by 2100. More pessimistic, but also realistic, estimates claim that 90-95 percent will become extinct or seriously endangered by the end of this century. Most of these languages are indigenous languages. Revitalization of indigenous languages requires sustained effort by indigenous peoples and their communities.

As part of a local revitalization effort, I was hired as the part time Village Language Coordinator for the village of Newhalen through a grant that was received by Igiugig Village Council. Since being hired, I have taken a class through UAA- Kodiak called Alaska Native Language Apprenticeship. It opened up my eyes the need for Alaska Native Languages in schools. At Newhalen School as a whole, we have zero indigenous languages taught in our classrooms, and it has been that way for several years.

Our children and communities are starved for their indigenous languages and cultural. Recently at the SNAP Meet, I was able to participate in the ANE Cultural and Language activities lead by Michelle Ravenmoon, AlexAnna Salmon, Audrey Odomin, and Robert Kakaruk. This 3-hour opportunity was the #1 rated activity of the SNAP Meet by the students

and chaperones. It was amazing and it was a beginning! I heard there were similar ratings from the BBRCTE Class in Naknek.

Last weekend I attended the BBNC Language Summit that brought together people from all over Bristol Bay who have an interest in Bristol Bay Languages. There were a lot of tears, laughter, sadness, healing, and hope shared in stories, songs, and prayers. The one overall arching theme that I took away from it was that we have to do something NOW if we are going to do something to grow new language speakers. Fluent indigenous speakers are quickly disappearing. Most were raised by their grandparents and they themselves are now grandparents or great grandparents. Local native languages are QUICKLY becoming lost throughout our villages.

The Lake Iliamna area has two distinct dialects unlike anywhere else- one for Dena'ina and one for Yugcetun (Yup'ik). If new speakers are not taught soon, these dialects both will be lost as spoken languages. Learning from audio recordings and videos does not even begin to compare to learning from a real live person.

Languages are the keys to life, keys to history, keys to a way of living. We need to embrace our local languages and give the gift to the next generations by making language learning a priority in the classrooms throughout the school district. It will not be easy. It will take a lot time, planning, and flexibility but it can be done. Please consider implementing indigenous language learning as a priority in the classrooms.

Sincerely,

Evelynn Trefon