

Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District

333 Schoenbar Rd. • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

Ph. (907) 247-2109 Fax: (907) 247-3820

Melissa Johnson, Interim Superintendent • Katie Jo Parrott, Business Manager

Tiffany Batura, Human Resources • Derek Meister, Special Services • Alonso Escalante, Curriculum



May 25, 2022

Justin Breese
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

Delivered via Email

Mr. Breese:

Upon receipt of your complaint submitted on April 6, 2022, I have conducted a thorough investigation and have determined the following based on a finding of fact:

There is no Southeast Alaska tribal religion, nor specific religious belief in Creationism amongst the Southeast tribes. Therefore, none of the Southeast Traditional Tribal Values are religious statements or tenets. It follows, then, that no intent exists, whether historically or contemporaneously, for the values to be used in a manner other than as cultural knowledge sharing. This has been confirmed by Southeast Alaska tribal leaders, and local and regional cultural experts, elders, and culture bearers.

The posters on display in KGBSD schools identify the listed values as Southeast Traditional Tribal Values developed, adapted, and approved at the 2004 Elders Forum on Traditional Values. Video archive from the 2004 Elders Forum explains the context of the values, as follows:

In reference to the values as a whole, Joe Hotch, Klukwan elder stated

“Tlingit value(s) means my way of life as a Tlingit person. It is very important when we say Tlingit values, it means our way of life, our way of life. That’s what it means... There is a lot of interest in our way of life by non-Natives.”

This demonstrates the intent of the values to be firmly rooted in culture and sharing of historical traditions, i.e. ways of life.

This intent is prominently displayed on the posters in the title, i.e. “Southeast Traditional Tribal Values – Our Way of Life,” and serves to specify the values as cultural, not religious. Furthermore, the title indicates a regional and historical basis for the values that points to a frame of reference for understand their scope; it is implied that there are, alternately, non-tribal, non-regional, and/or non-traditional values and ways of life held by students, staff, and the community at large.

Furthermore, in reference to the tribal values that emphasize respect, Juneau elder Ethel Lund stated:

“The cornerstone of Tlingit values has always been respect, and from that everything else falls into place. So it seems to me in developing our own values... we should start off with respect for self and others, and for all creation... There is a whole ceremony that you go through [when you carve a totem] showing respect for the tree, we show respect for the animals before we take them... Reverence and respect for all life. I think that should be the cornerstone of the development of any values that we come away with.”

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This indicates that reference to creation or Creator is in reference to all living things in nature. There is, therefore, no intent to promote a specific religious doctrine related to creation or Creator.

Lastly, the tribal values posters displayed in KGBSD facilities identify both state and federal government education agencies as sponsors at the bottom of each poster, indicating appropriateness for use in public schools:

- Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
- Circles of Care SAMHSA Substance Abuse Planning Project
- Elderly Nutrition Program
- **Johnson O'Malley Program**
- Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative
- **Alaska Association of School Boards**

DETERMINATION

Based on these findings of fact, I have determined that there is no religious doctrine or tenet related to or in association with the Southeast Traditional Tribal Values being taught or promoted in KGBSD schools, neither as part of a curriculum nor within the Position Behavior Intervention & Support program at Ketchikan Charter School nor in display of the posters in schools and classrooms. Therefore, no change to the current use of the Southeast Traditional Tribal Values within KGBSD schools is recommended.

Per Board Policy 1312.20 Public Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials and Administrative Regulation 1312.20, a copy of this determination has been provided to the Superintendent and to you, the complainant within 60 days after filing of the complaint.

Per AR 1312.20, you may request this determination report be brought to the School Board for consideration and final decision. To request this action, please provide this request for Board review to me in writing as follows: "I wish to appeal this determination to the Board of Education for consideration and final decision."

Should you request reconsideration of the determination by the School Board, a meeting of the School Board will be scheduled and you will be notified of the time and date of the meeting.

Please let me know if you have any questions about this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie Parrott'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Katie' being more prominent.

Katie Jo Parrott, Superintendent's designee