

# Postsecondary Bridging Framework for Middle and High Schools

## Overview

Life after high school can involve a range of postsecondary opportunities from career, technical or military training to two-year or four-year college programs. Unfortunately, not enough students are accessing these opportunities. Alaska’s worst-in-the-nation outcomes indicate a pressing need to transform our postsecondary preparation approaches. School administrators, educators, families, and community organizations across Alaska are looking for resources and strategies to ensure more students complete postsecondary education.

In 2021 the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) partnered with the Southeast Network of Alaska CAN to respond to this need by developing a Bridging Framework for Alaska.

Figure 1. Illustrates core concepts of Alaska’s Bridging Framework, including linking postsecondary opportunities to meaningful work in a student’s home community and beyond and emphasizing three equally critical elements of Identity, Navigation, and Academic Preparedness.

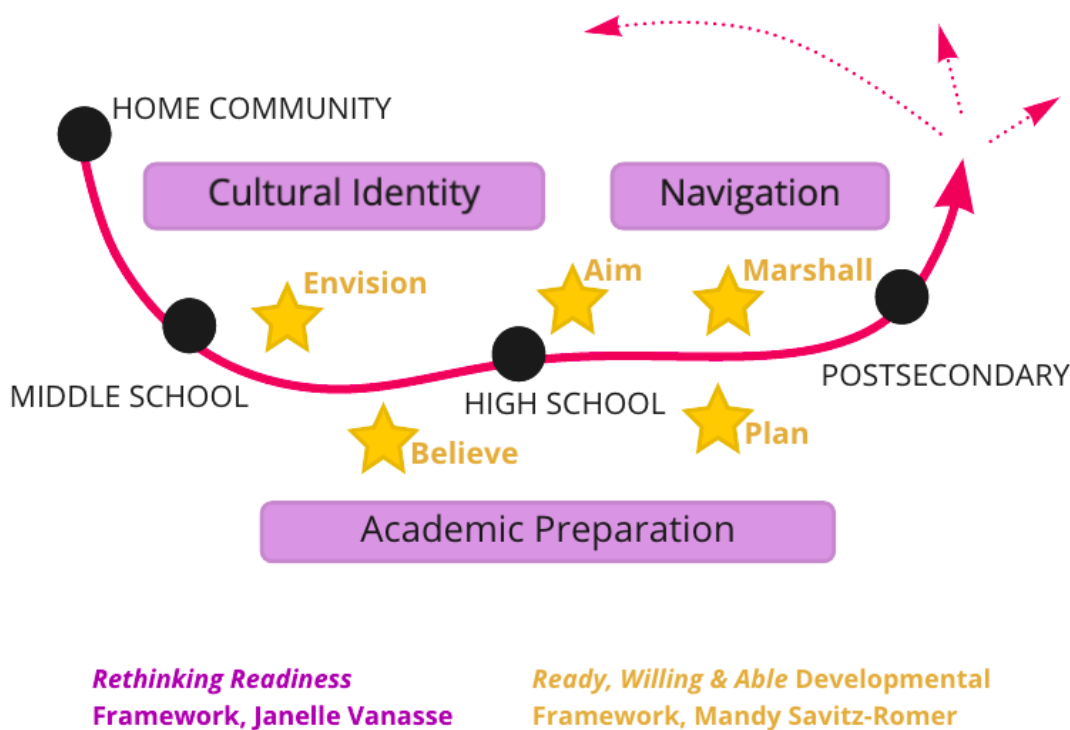


Figure 1

Alaska's Bridging Framework is informed by:

- *Rethinking Readiness*, Mount Edgecumbe Superintendent Janelle Vanasse's doctoral project which explores using Alaska Native culture identity as a strength
- *Ready, Willing, and Able*, a book by Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne Bouffard and related presentations through the Harvard Grad School of Education.
- Existing resources made available through ACPE including the Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS)
- The experience and wisdom of our community partners, especially those working with Alaska Native students.

For more about the research and evidence that informs the Framework, the pressing need to rethink Alaska's approach, and how this model differs from a traditional approach see the Theory of Change section below or this [question & answer one-pager](#).

### Components of Alaska's Bridging Framework:

The Framework, (Figure 2) outlines a way to systemically support each student in 6th through 12th grade to understand themselves and their goals. The Framework is grounded in a holistic approach that builds on a range of mentoring, life, and academic experiences to foster the confidence and skills (navigation), sense of self (identity), and preparation (academics) needed to successfully pursue postsecondary opportunities. The Framework takes an ecosystem approach acknowledging that family members, school staff, peers, other supportive adults, and even the school environment influence and support these experiences.

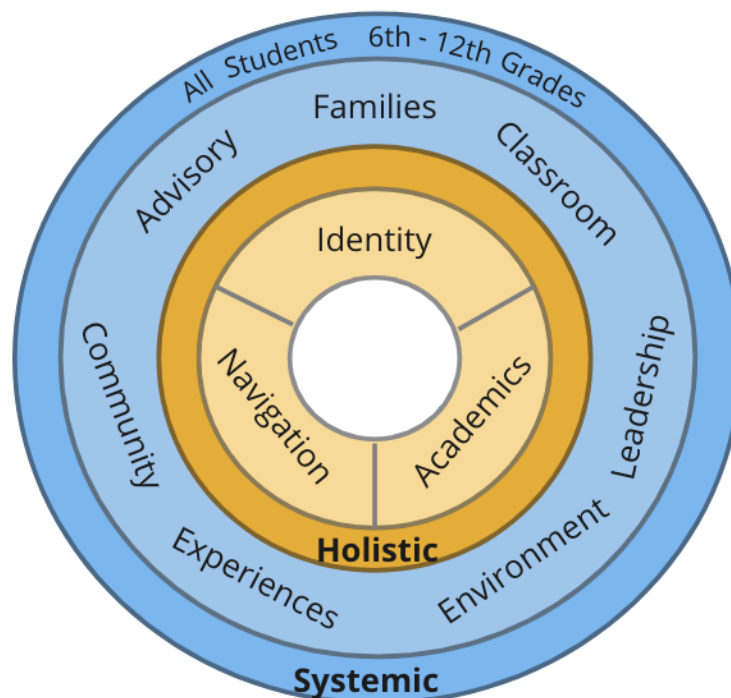


Figure 2

## Who Should Use the Bridging Framework

The Framework is designed primarily for school leaders, counselors, and educators to reflect on, plan, and implement sequenced strategies to help students prepare for life after high school.

Community and tribal organizations, postsecondary institutions, and families can also use the Framework to consider where they fit into the network of support students need to succeed.

## What's Inside

1. A Planning Matrix: an essential grade level, place-based, role-specific checklist
2. Key Terms
3. Theory of Change & Evidence: why a new approach is needed
4. Ties to Existing Initiatives
5. Tips for Getting Started
6. Case Studies & Examples to illustrate how communities have implemented strategies
7. Activities to complement the Planning Matrix that are broken out by grade and theme
8. Additional reading, resources and information that informs the Framework.

The Planning Matrix is a tool to help school staff and community partners organize the network of student supports.

The Planning Matrix is organized by:

- **Where** (the setting/location) & **Who** (relationship/role)
- **Grade & Theme** (the focus area for that stage of development)

The completed Example illustrates what a plan might look like in a community in Southeast Alaska. The Key Terms section provides an explanation of what is intended by each of the terms used.

The Theory of Change dives deeper into the research and evidence that informs the Framework, the pressing need to rethink Alaska's approach, and how this differs from traditional college preparation and access models. If you are someone who needs to understand "the why" before considering "the how", we encourage you to start here.

Ties to Existing Initiatives outlines how this ties to and builds on other current school improvement initiatives and professional learning opportunities.

Tips for Getting Started suggests different ways school teams can approach this work.

The Case Studies illustrate how schools and community partners have worked together to implement certain strategies and can be replicated or modified to fit your school and community. Activities can be used directly with students. The case studies and activities are developmentally appropriate, aligned, and complementary and were selected for their ability to foster identity development and navigation skills. These are organized by suggested grade level.

The Additional resources are available in the references section.

## 1. Planning Matrix

	Theme	Advisory (Counselors, Teachers, etc.)	Classroom (Teachers, Embedded)	Family (Parents, aunties & uncles...)	Environment (Whole school)	Experiences (Internship, dual enroll, campus)	Community (Near peers, orgs, Tribes, businesses)	Leadership (School leaders, boards)
6th	Where am I from? (Family)							
7th	Where am I from? (Community)							
8th	Who am I? Who do I want to be?							
9th	I belong, We belong							
10th	Trying things out							
11th	Navigating & preparing							
12th	Execute plan A, prepare for unknown							
13th	Beyond 12th grade							

## Example Plan

	Theme	Advisory (Counselors, Teachers, etc.)	Classroom (Classroom, Embedded)	Family (Parents, aunties & uncles...)	Environment (Whole school, on the walls...)	Experiences (Internship, dual enroll, campus)	Community (Near peers, orgs, Tribes, businesses)	Leaders (School leaders, boards)
6th	Where am I from? (Family)	SEL: growth mindset, self-reflection self-regulate	Who am I poem, Ancestry project (Lang arts)	Opportunities for families to talk with kids about values, future,	Growth mindset,  College banners	STEAM, hands- on learning through failure	Tribe: Cohost family event focused on values	
7th	Where am I from? (Community)	Identity Tree, AK CIS: reality check	Explore community, Transitions guide (social studies)	How to support: Encourage high expectations	Career experiences, “I help my community by...”,	Cultural & community connections; participate in activities	Cohost family event w/ local leaders, what education is needed for local jobs.	
8th	Who am I? Who do I want to be?	HS/grad plan, Grad, APS, explicit testing requirements, asset mapping	Explore occupations (all classes)	Event with career challenge cards, spring events & comms. about reqs & family support,	HS grads hall- way parade (all grades participate)	Exposure to college campus (if possible), Students,	Community & near peers: share exper. (virtual visit)	
9th	I belong, We Belong	Grad plan, aligned with APS, easy to reference, AK CIS interest assesment, vision board	Work readiness (course), Native ways of knowing (science)	Who do you want to be, what needs to happen to get there	College banners, Native Pathways checklist (all grades)	Community Service Project, summer program	Tribe: Cohost family event	
10th	Trying things out	Grad plan check, support outcomes of practice test (tutoring?)	Heritage project (Digital lit or English) Native ways of knowing	Include mentors (Aunties & Uncles) to build support network	Local Career Fair -> instagram, hall-way posters, checklist	Cultural Internship, AHEC Health careers camp, practice test,	Tribe: Cohost event focused on mentors, how to support students	

			(civics)					
11th	Navigating & preparing	Grad plan includes apps & scholarships, AKCIS: Reality check, career explore	Personal Essay (English), Fin. reality fair (math)	College Fair, FAFSA Family events	Teachers wearing college sweatshirts on college days, checklist	Dual credit Internship Fin. reality fair SAT/ACT/Work Keys test Campus visit	Tribe: cohost FAFSA event, Community: Fin reality fair	
12th	Execute plan A, prepare for unknown	Grad plan includes apps & scholarships, college app support, asset mapping	Resume (English)	College Fair, FAFSA Family events	Visually celebrate acceptance on walls, grads parade, checklist	Dual Credit Campus visit	Near peer: what it's really like. HS grad parade through elementary schools	
13th	Beyond 12th grade	Plans and resources for students not enrolling, network of supports						

Light yellow activities emphasize identity, culture, and social and emotional learning skills.

Darker yellow activities emphasize navigation skills.

## 2. Key Terms

### Advisory

These activities may be led by the counselor, however volunteers or identified teachers can be designated to “extend” the counseling office and work directly with students using advising activities. Some schools set up advising time in which teachers are posed to provide counseling “extension” services.

### Classroom

These are activities led by teachers that can be embedded into regular academic classes. There are many more opportunities than these listed, but they serve as clear examples of purposeful alignment between content curriculum and meeting advising/college readiness goals.

### Family

These activities can be done at a family meeting (Migrant Ed Family nights if your school has them), or involve the community. The definition of “family” is intended to be broad and include aunts and uncles. The activities are designed to help schools intentionally engage and support families beyond sending information, which is often not enough, especially for students who are the first in their families to go to college.

### Environment

These activities help create a college-going environment. They may happen in the walls of the classroom or school building, or they may be a whole-building activity like participating in a hallway parade celebrating high school graduates.

### Experiences

These activities may take place in school (practice exams or dual enrollment course) or out of school (job, internship, leadership opportunities, summer bridging program); the important part is that students have an opportunity to build their confidence and self-identity through experience.

### Community

The community partners may play a role by offering out-of-school leadership and cultural programs, co-hosting events with the school, offering job shadowing opportunities or serving as role models. Near peers - recent grads - are an important part of the community.

### Leaders

These activities require direction from the administration and/or school board. Some refer to systemic practices that require set priorities that may be part of a strategic plan. The activities that school leaders take tend to be less tied to a specific grade and are more focused on implementing the system. Some activities may be carried out by a set leadership team.

## College & Postsecondary

These terms are used interchangeably to refer to education that takes place after secondary (high school) and can include: Certifications, credentials, degrees, internships, apprenticeships, licenses, and military training. “College” does not refer exclusively to a four year bachelor’s degree, but rather any type of educational experience after high school.

## 3. Theory of Change & Evidence

If students know where they are from and understand the cultural strengths and resiliency of their home family and community then they will have the foundation for exploring who they are. If schools, family, and community supports help students explore who they are then they can reconcile different aspects of their identity and build a solid foundation for envisioning who they want to become. If students and families can envision how educational opportunities are linked to meaningful work and contribution to their community, then families will be better able to support their students and students will develop intrinsic motivation needed to pursue and persist in college (defined broadly as degrees, certificates, credentials, or training.) If students have experiences that build skills and confidence, then they will develop the belief that they can succeed in college. If students and families understand how to navigate the system and why to support students in pursuing education after high school then students will have a strong support network that can help them access and persist in college. If students have a sense of self, a network of support, intrinsic motivation and help planning and navigating the system then they will access, persist, and complete college. If more Alaskan students complete college , then Alaska’s communities will have the skilled workforce they need to thrive.

## Problem

According to the [Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education](#), Alaska ranks 50th in the nation when it comes to the number of high school students enrolling, persisting, and completing college. Statewide [School Climate and Connected Survey](#) results reveal that students are foreclosing on college early; a third of middle and high schools students are not planning to pursue education after high school.

Meanwhile, according to the Alaska Department of Labor, [65% of jobs](#) will require a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025. Alaska is falling short of this target, and many employers say they cannot find teachers, healthcare workers, technicians, and tradespeople to fill job openings. Alaska also has the highest rate of disconnected youth - young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither working nor in school - of any state, according to [Measure of America](#).

Recent reports from ACPE also found that financial supports like the FAFSA and the Alaska Performance Scholarship are available, but the students who could most use the support are often not accessing these resources.



## Solution

Alaska's traditional approach to helping students access postsecondary education is not working for many of our students - and our communities. This Framework seeks to outline a new approach based primarily on existing resources with an emphasis on development of identity and navigation skills.

Participants at the 2021 annual statewide Alaska CAN (postsecondary Completion and Access Network) conference identified barriers facing Alaskan students including access, exposure and preparation, navigation, support, representation and identity.

Of these factors, "identity" warrants special attention. Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne M. Bouffard write in their book *Ready, Willing, and Able; A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success* that college access programs are often "missing a crucial component; the 'identity' part of 'college-going identity.'" They explain that students first need to be able to envision their future and believe that it is possible in order to pursue and stick with college and career training.

Long-time Alaskan educator Janelle Vanasse recently completed a doctoral thesis examining how cultural identity could be used as a strength for college going students. She sites research from Huffman (2001) that outlines the transculturation process that many indigenous college students move through from *alienation* (feeling completely out of place), through *self-discovery*, realignment and ultimately to *participation* (full use of culture and heritage as a strength.) The research finds that students who viewed their cultural identity as a source of strength had the highest GPAs. For more on this research see [www.rethinkingreadiness.com](http://www.rethinkingreadiness.com).

Helping students understand who they are is essential for tapping into what motivates them. Drs. Savitz-Romer and Bouffard point to studies showing that students are more likely to complete college and other postsecondary programs when they tap into intrinsic motivation. For example, a student's desire to care for their family or help their community may spark intrinsic motivation, whereas extrinsic motivation like higher future income often has little lasting impact.

Readers may recognize many of these identity development activities as good Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Indeed, they are. One important change, however, is helping students make the link to a plan for life after high school.

Special attention is also paid to the navigation skills that both students and their families need to complete the many challenging steps to access college. Activities were selected to first develop an understanding of why it is important to tackle a complicated task like filling out the FAFSA, sometimes years before families get a glimpse of the first form or application. The activities are also sequenced so that students can more easily plan for and access the Alaska Performance Scholarship. The navigation skills build on real-life experiences so students can learn about the process - and build their confidence - through doing, not just telling. And they are designed to

reach all students, not just those who already have the motivation to walk into the guidance office or career centers.

The activities are suggested based on their ability to help students develop their identity and navigational skills through these evidenced-based approaches:

- Building habits of mind, including a growth mindset
- Building a strong sense of self-identity
- Envisioning their future; building aspiration & motivation
- Offering experiences which help build the belief that it is possible
- Building navigational skills
- Building networks of support
- Having agency in the process

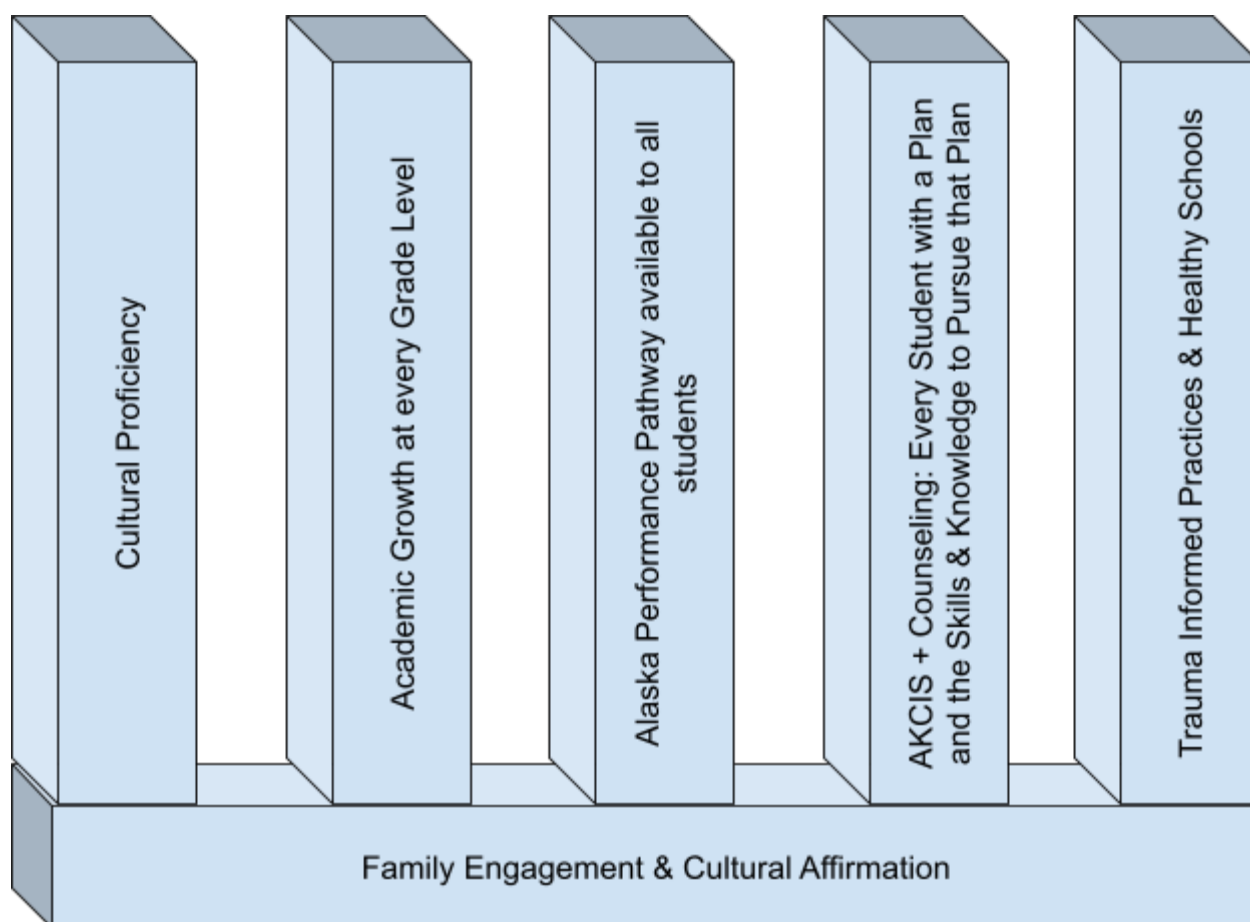
## 4. Ties to Existing Initiatives

Teachers, school administrators, counselors and other school staff already have more to do than time in the day. Rather than ask schools to embark on another new initiative, the Bridging Framework seeks to build on existing strategies and professional learning opportunities to link to - and ultimately to improve - post secondary outcomes.

At its core, postsecondary transition support is about helping students understand who they are, where they are from, and where they are headed. Social and Emotional Learning, Trauma Engaged Schools, Cultural Standards and Culturally Proficient Training, and Family Engagement all form a solid foundation for students to understand themselves.

Meanwhile, efforts to ensure all students are making academic growth and have access to resources like the Alaska Performance Scholarship help ensure students are academically prepared.

The Bridging Framework seeks to link these initiatives to explicit support to create and pursue a plan for life after high school rounding out the experience so that students have the navigation skills, identity development, and academic preparation to pursue their goals.



More specifically, foundational activities (prerequisites) that should be in place to ensure that students are academically prepared for postsecondary opportunities include:

- High School must provide multi-tiered support classes that are designed to allow students to move back into a regular track and/or provide options for acceleration later. Concept: Freshman must be provided the LEARNING support they need to continue to grow academically WITHOUT freshman class placement being a 4-year tracked sentence.
- High schools must provide opportunities to achieve both Alaska Performance Scholarship options (Math & Science and Social Studies & Language), providing students a choice and providing students the opportunity to do both for a classic college prep route.
- Schools must provide opportunities for bridging classes or programs that allow students to experience what postsecondary education looks and feels like. This could include Career and Technical Education courses with certificates, dual credit college courses, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses. In smaller schools, these may be through a summer or out-of-school program.

- High Schools are recommended to partner with extended day/year programs often offered by community partners, tribes, universities and other agencies to include: tutoring, credit recovery, cultural identity, self-exploration, leadership, and bridge experiences.
- Pre-service and current teachers should receive training and support on how to incorporate career readiness and training into their classrooms and current curriculum.

## 5. Tips for Getting Started

Each region and community has different needs and networks of support. We encourage schools and communities to build out a plan based on their strengths and interests. The important part is thinking through how to engage all of the people who are supporting students - counselors, teachers, administrators, families, tribes and community organizations, near peers and mentors - to support students in thinking about and planning for life after high school in a way that is meaningful to the students and their families.

There is no one right way to do this work, however we have suggested some step below to help you get started.

1. School teams - including a counselor and/or administrator and possibly family and community partners - uses the [Rethinking Readiness Assessment](#) to identify strengths and opportunities for growth in the school and in programming. Teams could use the Planning Matrix in this document or a more simple Inventory [here](#).
2. The School team sets goals for areas to improve.
3. The School accesses existing training, community partnerships and statewide initiatives to build capacity for improvement.
4. The School selects activities to implement from the Bridging Framework or with guidance from their school and community.
5. The School submits successful activities back to the Bridging Framework to foster continued improvement and shared learning.