A vital component of this process was the formation of a thirty-five member Advisory Committee that was representative of parents, school staff, students, cultural, business, and university representatives, and other community members. The mission of the Advisory Committee would be to create a secondary educational plan that was:

- Dedicated to high expectations and success for all students
- Reflective of the needs, values, and beliefs of the Juneau, Alaska community
- Based on current educational research and best practices
- Supportive of the goals of rigor, relevance, and relationships, and the strategic plan of the Juneau School District

Because our time with the Advisory Committee was limited and the issues so complex, we spent a great deal of time planning sessions to help build a sense of trust within the group and allow us to have the hard conversations. We worked exclusively out of a circle because we wanted to make sure that we distributed the power among all the members of the committee as we symbolically created a sense of community and equity within this group. The community agreements that we developed helped us listen to each other and respect the different perspectives represented within the group.

We began with the Atlas Looking at Data Protocol. It was a powerful moment as the group began to realize the implications of this data. It became obvious that Alaska Natives and students of poverty were being failed by the current school system. The impact of this data remained with us throughout the entire process and created many opportunities for the group to discuss issues of equity within the school and community. From this we learned that both school and community people appreciated the use of a protocol that promoted honest conversation and forced us to be more thoughtful.

To acheive our goal of hearing the community’s voice, we scheduled over twenty-five community forum meetings. The forums were scheduled purposely to ensure that all voices in the community were heard, especially those of different cultural groups. We worked hard to make sure that people of color and people representing the dominant culture sat next to each other in the same circles to hear each other’s comments and concerns. All forum participants responded to the following questions:

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