

The National Indian Education Association

WHOLE CHILD APPROACH



A Whole Child Approach



Listening Sessions Conducted by the National Indian Education Association and the Center for Educational Improvement and its Coalition for the Future of Education

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OUR VISION

OUR VISION

is that public educators understand the strengths, resilience, and innate intelligence of Indigenous people. We envision a world in which all educators understand that their training is based in a western world view which supports western superiority and lacks understanding of Native contributions to history and contemporary society.

We envision a future where educators are aware of the ancestral strengths of Native youth and that the innate intelligence of Native youth is assumed and nurtured.

-Holly Echo-Hawk & Melanie Johnson (2023, p. 55)

Executive Summary

What do Native children and families need to thrive? As Holly Echo-Hawk (a tribal behavioral health expert) and Melanie Johnson (Director of the Whole Child Initiative for the National Indian Education Association) said in their chapter in the book *Leading with Vitality and Hope*:

Thousands of Native American school-age children and youth are dependent on underfunded public school systems, and when combined with an educator who lacks knowledge about Indigenous life or who possesses a romanticized view of Native American culture, the intellectual capacity of Indigenous students can be frequently underestimated. This can lead to the systemic writing-off of thousands of youth, ignoring or dampening their potential to contribute to society. (Echo-Hawk & Johnson, 2023, p.55)

To truly meet the educational needs of Native children and youth, schools and educational systems will need to be redesigned. The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) has long held a vision for a holistic approach to the education of Native children and youth. Considering the pervasive trauma and discrimination faced by Native youth, NIEA is seeking to establish sustainable policies and practices in schools that meet children's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Founded in 1969, NIEA advances comprehensive, culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians by promoting educational sovereignty for Native students.

The Whole Child Initiative

The Whole Child Initiative, a strengths-based educational initiative of the NIEA, aims to focus on Native culture, knowledge, and traditions to address the minds and spirits of Native students through emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual supports.

NIEA's approach to its Whole Child Initiative goes far beyond goals to increase learning and academic achievement, recognizing the need for deep and meaningful engagement of students. As Linda Darling-Hammond and Channa Cook-Harvey from the Learning Policy Institute have written, a Whole Child approach can help reduce stress and anxiety, while "seeking to address the distinctive strengths, needs, and interests of students" (p. v).

In considering components of a Whole Child Approach, NIEA turned to the definition that Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey used in their report:

A whole child approach to education is one that recognizes the interrelationships among all areas of development and designs school policies and practices to support them. These include access to nutritious food, health care, and social supports; secure relationships; educative and restorative disciplinary practices; and learning opportunities that are designed to challenge and engage students while supporting their motivation and self-confidence to persevere and succeed. All aspects of children's well-being are supported to ensure that learning happens in deep, meaningful, and lasting ways. (2018. p. 1)



To reimagine a Whole Child approach specifically for Native people and communities, NIEA sought input from Native families, educators, and policymakers during three virtual listening sessions in March of 2023. During these sessions, a diverse group of largely Native participants, including representatives from 81 of the 574 tribes in the U.S., spoke to the overwhelming need for healing centered practices and better mental health and social supports in schools and communities.

Participants identified priorities for reducing the impact of long-standing and current trauma, helping children form positive identities, and ensuring that educators understand and are prepared for the journey ahead as educational systems are revamped. They recommended that educators, tribes, and policymakers secure educational sovereignty — that education be controlled by Native people.

Participants in these sessions were clear: The best and most promising practices build upon the ancestral, community, familial, and tribal strengths of Native communities. The well-being of Native children and youth will be strengthened as they learn about their rich and vibrant cultures, history, languages, and traditions.

A Paradigm Shift to Implement Holistic Learning Systems

To meet the urgent and long-standing needs of Native people, in her opening remarks to the Listening Session, Diana Cournoyer, the Executive Director of NIEA, conveyed the acute need for a paradigm shift:

I'm asking for you to help us stop the spinning of the world and shift it into a different direction, because that's what's going to have to happen mentally, emotionally, and physically, in our learning spaces. This paradigm shift is necessary to meet all of our students' needs, not just Native students'.

We must create learning systems, not education systems. We must create learning opportunities that embrace what we know, how we know it, and how we apply it. And I remind you all that this does include social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, physical, mental, and then academic. Not, "and academic," "and then academic."



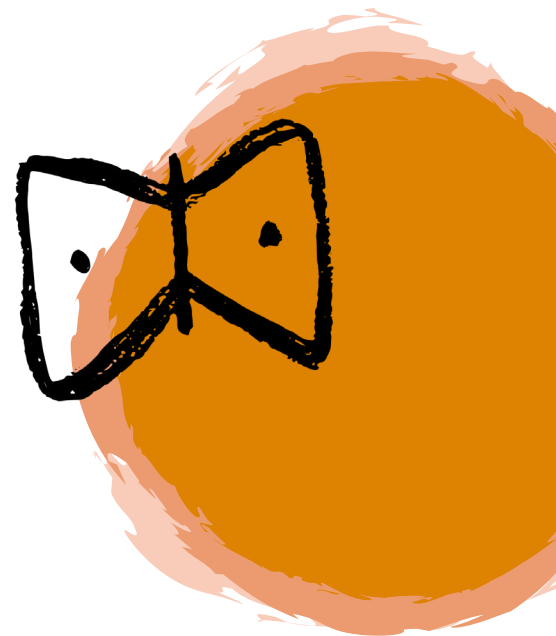
The Process

In March 2023, the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), with support from the Center for Educational Improvement (CEI) and its Coalition for the Future of Education, conducted a series of three virtual listening sessions with Native educators, families, community members, policymakers, and allied stakeholders. The NIEA invited the CEI as an ally based on its experience in engaging communities to support transformational education systems focused on collective healing and holistic learning.

For the virtual listening sessions, Native speakers helped to frame the issues for each session with brief introductory presentations. These were followed by opportunities for participants to speak out in recorded breakout room sessions, with about 10-20 participants in each room. The discussions were facilitated by 18 staff, including nine from NIEA who led the discussions and nine from the Center for Educational Improvement who served as note-takers.

The findings of the listening sessions include recommendations from 546 people who registered for the sessions and more in-depth discussions with the 250 participants. Data from the larger group of 520 helped to inform the findings through their responses to a series of questions about their interests, concerns, and recommendations. All registrants were also given opportunities to view the listening session slides and give feedback on sessions and materials. Of the initial registrants, 350 were educators, 35 were parents or other family members, 30 represented governmental or private agencies, and more than 110 were community members; 81 tribes were represented.

The 90-minute sessions began by describing current research and thought leadership on ancestral pedagogy, Native brilliance, and trauma and ended with recommendations for policy and research development.



The Sessions

Session 1 began with a general welcome and orientation to Native brilliance and ancestral pedagogy, followed by opportunities for discussion of these concepts as well as general educational needs and concerns. The session ended with considerations for coalition building to address these needs.

Session 2 began with presentations on two broad topics: policy work by the NIEA in areas relevant to education and children's well-being and a consideration of trauma and its impact on children.

Session 3, the final session, included six presentations by Native speakers on educational policy, Native language, research, and coalition building. Participants were given opportunities to select sessions where they could speak out about their local activities, best practices, and concerns.

Data from the sessions came from notes and transcriptions from the breakout sessions. These data were analyzed by a team of researchers at the Center for Educational Improvement (CEI) under the leadership and guidance of Dr. Martha Staeheli from Yale University's Program for Recovery and Community Health using an informal qualitative analysis procedure, looking for repetition of keywords, phrases, and concepts.

Upon the completion of all sessions, CEI's research team combined data across the sessions and searched for major themes, comparing the overall results to the data from the individual sessions. The final six framework components reflect the initial ideas brought to the planning by NIEA and the participants' concerns for compassionate healing practices, new policies, and the significant need for educational sovereignty that also recognizes the unique needs and strengths of individual tribes. Together, these represent a holistic approach to understanding what Native children need to be successful.

Findings

Six major components of a Whole Child approach emerged from the sessions. These themes were influenced by the initial insights of NIEA and CEI and the brief presentations on specific topics in each session; ultimately, the six findings provide a way to cluster together the concerns and recommendations from participants. Their voice was critical to the final organization of this report.

Listening Session participants recommended focusing on traditional Native practices for learning and healing, assuring tribal and Native sovereignty, implementing local and state efforts supporting Native students, and incorporating an array of mental health and community supports while ensuring that students receive encouragement in compassionate school environments. For this to be realized, students, parents, and educators must have a foundational understanding of compassionate school environments and students' emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual needs must be met.

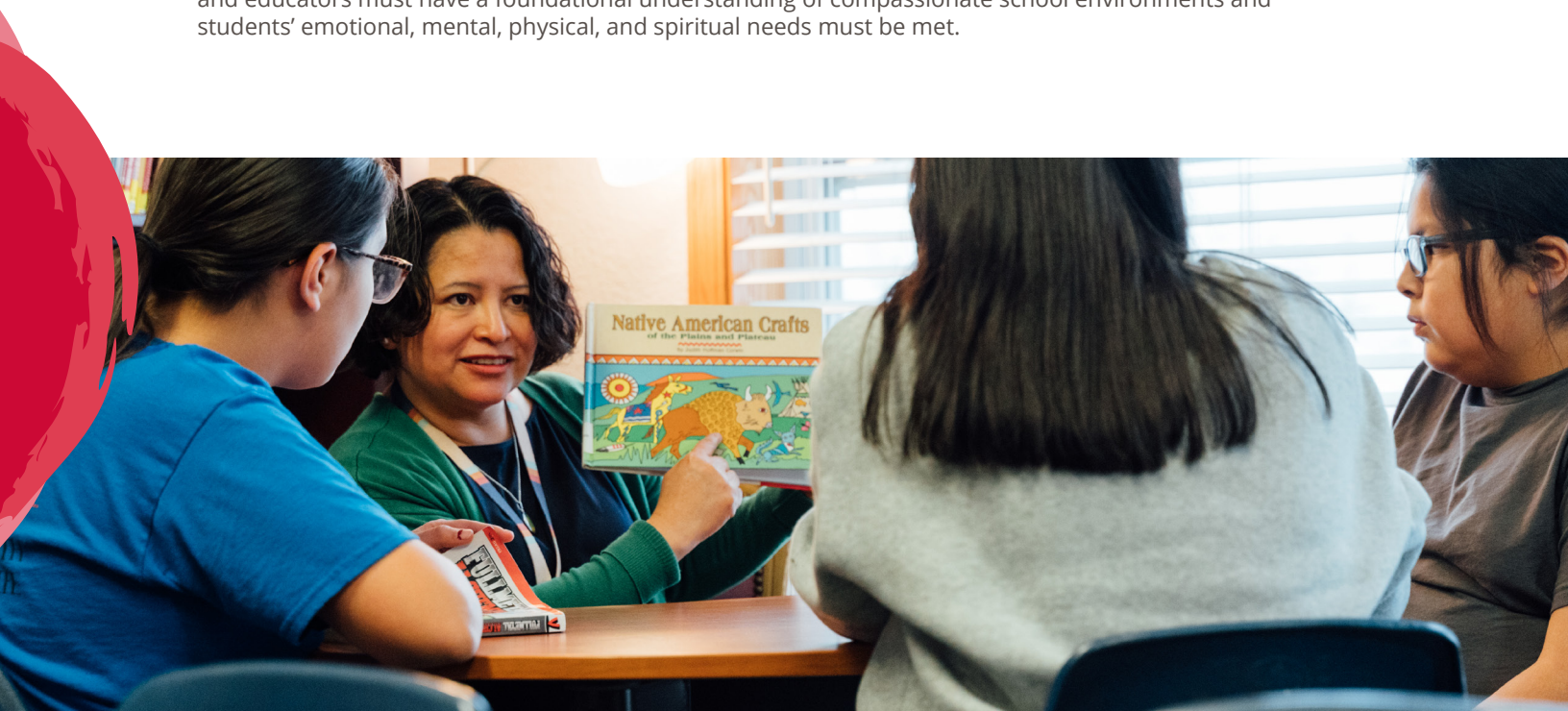




Figure 1. The NIEA Whole Child Approach

At the root of the recommendations of the Listening Session participants, underpinning the findings, is community-based education that bridges academic learning and real world practices, as well as culturally appropriate education. As Jon Rehney and colleagues from Northern Arizona State University wrote in the introduction to their book *Honoring our Heritage: Culturally Appropriate Practices for Indigenous Students*,

Culturally appropriate education is not just a basic human right, it is also good educational practice. The best way to contextualize education is to relate what students are learning to their cultures, communities, lives and land. While students need to learn the knowledge and skills included in tribal, state and national standards, they and their teachers also need to respond to local concerns and have some choice in what type of learning projects they can become engaged in. (Reyhner et al., 2011, p. viii)

With culturally appropriate education, a group’s language, culture, and worldview are woven into the routines, curriculum, instruction, policies, and the mission and vision of the school or district. However, along with cultural appropriateness comes the idea of being culturally responsive, described by Navin Singh as “liberating in that it guides students in understanding that no single version of ‘truth’ is total and permanent. For this, teachers make authentic knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students” (2011, p. 14).



FINDING #1: Promising educational practices for Native youth need to incorporate an understanding of (1a.) Native brilliance and (1b.) Ancestral pedagogy; (2) Teacher preparation and certification programs that help teachers understand and build on the significant contributions of Native people; (3) Integration of Native culture and languages; and (4) Native children’s Whole Child needs.



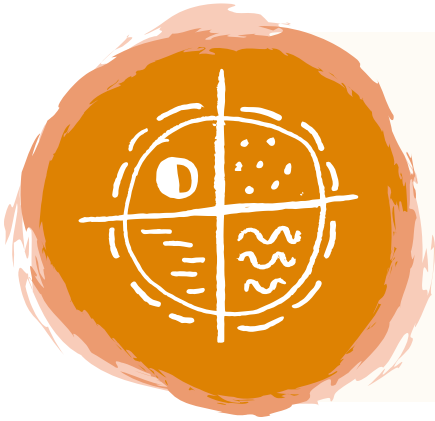
FINDING #2: Educational sovereignty is critical to effective and inclusive education. It is the ability, engagement, and sustainability of Native communities and tribes to determine, integrate, strategize, and control the life-long learning, growth, connections, and stewardship with, to, and in their communities. Non-Native educational stakeholders must be involved as allies rather than governing parties.



FINDING #3: State and regional initiatives that focus on building capacity for increased government-to-government relationships that honor the sovereign identities of Native nations, tribes, and Pueblos.




FINDING #4: Compassionate healing practices are essential to addressing long-standing and current and historical inequities, injustice, and trauma, including the ongoing impact of intergenerational trauma. Healing is needed to fully restore the sense of well-being for Native children, youth, and of their communities.



FINDING #5: The unique strengths and needs of individual tribes must be central to the education of Native youth. Each tribe is distinct, and although there may be similarities in language, history, proximity, and traditions, each needs to be treated as a distinct nation. Native people want a significant say in what is implemented in their communities rather than generalized approaches that minimize tribal-specific brilliance and alienate youth. Prescriptive “one-size fits all” approaches should be abandoned for community and tribally specific approaches that align with and speak to tribal communities, families, and individuals.



FINDING #6: More resources, better financing, research, and policy changes are needed to fully support the sovereignty and implementation of programs designed to strengthen Native children’s education and outcomes.



To improve the education and lives of Native students, participants underscored the priority of creating and implementing Native curricula; involving Native students, parents, communities, and culture in education; and defining each Tribe's authentic best practices in their authentic contexts. Realizing that prior attempts to advance Native sovereignty have been plagued by tokenism and less-than-genuine caring (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), leaders need to be cautious. As NIEA advances its Whole Child program, it needs to guard against fragmented and piecemeal approaches that celebrate diversity by introducing isolated examples of Native cultures, which seem to be merely an attempt to appease Native Americans, or frame everything under a national priority rather than recognizing unique tribal needs. Lastly, self-determined education— inclusive of beliefs, culture, history, language, norms, traditions, and values— must include opportunities for allies supporting this work to build cultural competency to navigate Native education systems.

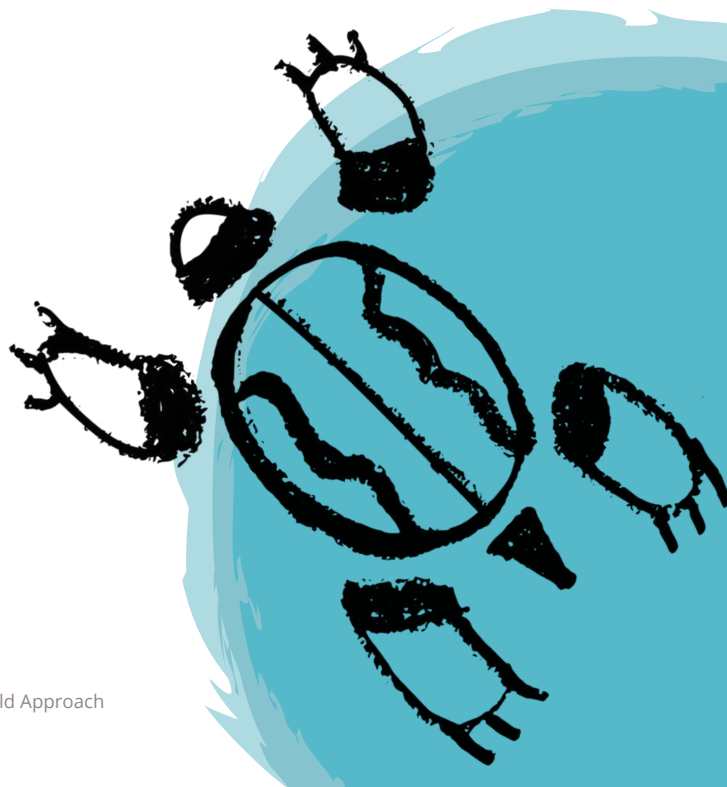
To obtain justice and equity, Native people insist that organizations led by dominant non-Native educators influenced by institutional, mainstream, and Westernized theory and thought step back and assume the role of allies. However, NIEA is choosing to clarify the term “ally” since, historically, many supposed “allies” have also perpetrated injustice.

NIEA is asking allies to consider their supportive relationship from the perspective of being a “relative.” In Native American communities, kinship and relatives play a crucial and central role in social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of life. The concept of kinship extends beyond immediate family members to include extended family, clans, and tribal members. Relatives provide social support and ensure that decisions are made in the best interest of the community, while being a safety net for each other and helping to build resilience of community members.

The Whole Child Listening Sessions will inform the next steps by providing a basis and rationale for future actions and recommendations for changes in policies and approaches to the education of Native students that are in keeping with NIEA's mission. The findings from these sessions will help the NIEA understand more fully how children and youth are being supported in local communities and through policies enacted at state and local levels. The findings will also guide NIEA as it introduces initiatives for systemic change, building foundational knowledge of Native education, and advocating for additional policy changes, research, and coalition building.

Terminology

For this report, we have chosen to refer to the Indigenous people of the United States as “Native” or “Native American” to differentiate between Native Americans and other Indigenous people throughout the world.



Glossary

- **Ally:** “A decolonial ally is willing to stand in a relationship with Native people, will seek out this relation while recognizing their privilege and affirming the sovereignty of those they seek to serve, and above all, will learn about the people independently, without imposing a burden on marginalized communities” (Sullivan-Clarke, 2020). See also relatives.
- **Ancestral pedagogy:** Pedagogy is the art of teaching. Individual Pedagogy is informed and influenced by our “Ancestors,” family, communities, tribes, and lived experiences (This requires us to understand that we are all teachers or knowledge holders and providers in some way).
- **Colonialism:** “Is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically” (Oxford Dictionary).
- **Cultural competence:** The ability to critically reflect on one’s own culture and professional paradigms to understand its cultural limitations and effect positive change.
- **Cultural genocide:** Forced acculturation, assimilation, and intentional and systematic patterns of unjust treatment.
- **Growth Mindset:** A mindset that prioritizes growth, learning, and improvement, particularly when encountering challenges.
- **Identity:** For Native people, incorporate the dignity of an Indian identity, including an artful life, whether it includes ceremonial singing and dancing, architectural, painting, speaking, or in the way one’s socio-cultural life is structured (Riley, 1993).





- **Native brilliance:** The innate intelligence, resilience, and strength of Native peoples.
- **Native resilience:** Fostered by the intention and inspiration of Native life, values, philosophies, and languages. Native people are strong and enduring (Ortiz, 1993).
- **Protective factors:** Conditions that help people deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate or eliminate risks in families and communities. These factors can be found in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society. Protective factors may include skills, coping strategies, individual or communal strengths, and available resources and supports.
- **Relatives:** In Native American communities, kinship and relatives play a crucial and central role in social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of life. The concept of kinship extends beyond immediate family members to include extended family, clans, and tribal members. Relatives provide social support, ensure that decisions are made in the best interest of the community, ensure a safety net for supporting each other, and help build community members' resilience. NIEA is asking individuals and organizations who want to support the Whole Child Initiative to consider themselves as relatives.
- **Sovereignty:** The right of a people to self-government and self-education, including the rights to linguistic and cultural expression.
- **Traditional Knowledge:** The knowledge, innovations, and practices of Native peoples.
- **Whole child approach to education:** An approach that “recognizes the interrelationships among all areas of development and designs school policies and practices to support them” (Darling-Hammond & Harvey-Cook, 2018). For Native peoples this is an inclusive approach, incorporating Native and tribal values and traditions, and addressing mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

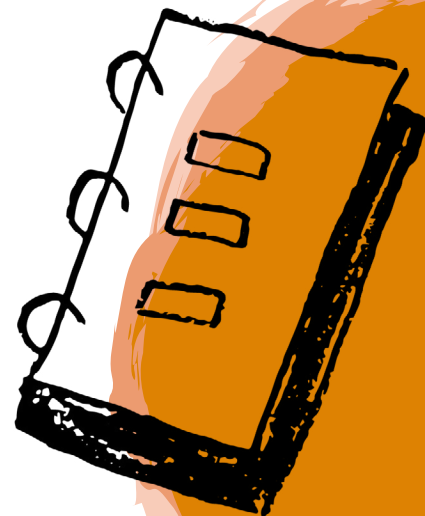


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I. Listening Sessions

Introduction

Native cultures are embedded, inherently, with a rich understanding of all living things and their connection with the land, the waters, and the sky. Native tribes have built traditions, since time immemorial, honoring the sun, moon, forest, rivers, mountains, seas, and animals with four legs, two legs, and wings—those that soar into the space above us, those who swim, and those who walk on the earth. Moreover, Native ancestors were scientists, early astronomers, inventors, mathematicians, policymakers, musicians, and artists (Keoke & Porterfield, 2009). Their discoveries have largely been left out of most history books and educational classes (Echo-Hawk & Johnson, 2023; LaCourse, 1979; Masta & Rosa, 2019; Pleasant et al., 2018; White, 2009).

In some of the best educational practices today, all youth are learning of Native wisdom, a wisdom that is foundational to the healing of communities and our planet (Bastida & Jackson, 2020). The forgotten Native history is being revived and shared through changes to the teacher preparation requirements that have been established in recent years in states such as Washington, Oregon, North and South Dakota, and New Mexico. Thanks to the persistent efforts of caring family members and Native communities, students across grade levels are again learning to be stewards of their communities, education, and futures by realizing the greatness of Native peoples, by learning how they cultivated the earth, practiced conservation, established systems of government, studied the rhythms of the earth—the tides, the seasons, the stars—and formed alliances based on a deep regard for all life forms.

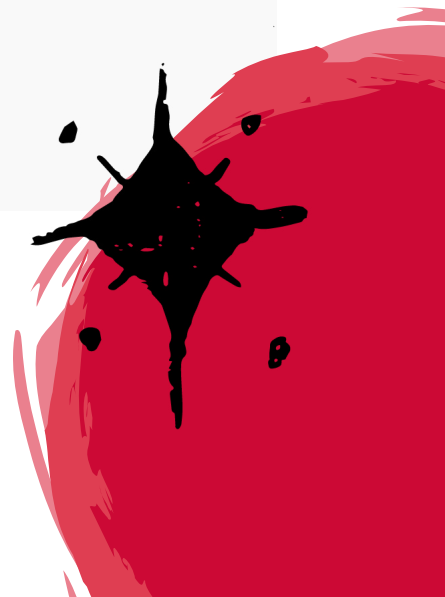
A Blueprint for Positive Change

Education, holistic health, and individual and collective well-being are vital components of a blueprint for positive change for Native children and youth. Founded in 1969, NIEA has been instrumental in driving transformative change and fostering healing within Native communities. The Whole Child Initiative is an extension of its Culturally Responsive Education program, which delivers trauma training for educators, Native empowerment and resilience exercises, and online resources to over 40,000 Native students as part of the response to COVID-19.

NIEA Mission Statement: The National Indian Education Association advances comprehensive, culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

NIEA strives to:

- Promote educational sovereignty.
- Support continuing use of traditional knowledge and language.
- Improve educational opportunities and results in our communities.



The Whole Child Initiative: Purpose and Goals



With the recognition of the many strengths of Native students, NIEA, through its Whole Child Initiative, seeks to reclaim the innate Native brilliance through the power of Education Sovereignty. NIEA wants to work as “relatives” (see glossary) with others to undertake systematic efforts for transformational change in schools, seeking to strengthen the physical and mental health of Native students while also enhancing their academic, social-emotional, cognitive, and identity development. The intended result is a greater sense of purpose, cultural identity, and enhanced physical, mental, and spiritual well-being for Native children and all children.

With the recognition of the many strengths of Native students, NIEA, through its Whole Child Initiative, seeks to reclaim the innate Native brilliance through the power of Education Sovereignty.

The NIEA approach to its Whole Child Initiative references the related work of others, such as the Learning Policy Institute, which defines Whole Child as an approach that “recognizes the interrelationships among all areas of development and designs school policies and practices to support them” (Darling-Hammond & Harvey-Cook, 2018, p. 1). The NIEA Whole Child approach integrates Native cultural and traditional activities and compassionate school practices (Mason et al., 2021) to meet children’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

The goals of the Whole Child Initiative are to:

1. Gain a better understanding of the needs and concerns around **setting a Whole Child vision to improve the education systems as well as children’s holistic well-being, which enhances and informs the academic achievement of Native students** across learning environments (public, private, and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools in rural, urban, and suburban areas). Educational learning environments, i.e., schools, should be extensions of the strong, integrated home-and community-based learning environments that remain cornerstones of Native American epistemology.
2. Record **recommendations from Native people who are experts, including families, educators, and key stakeholders about integrating the Whole Child vision into culture based educational opportunities for Native students**. This includes promotion of educational sovereignty, support for building Native identity through traditional knowledge and language, and reclaiming the brilliance of Native students through community, culturally, and tribally- based belief, knowledge, and value systems.
3. **Develop the parameters of a Whole Child vision to implement programs that enhance educators’ growth mindset and knowledge** regarding the brilliance of Native students and tribal-led and endorsed practices to nurture their unique, individual potentials. These parameters will be determined using culture-based methodologies to ensure understanding of cultural awareness, competence, humility, literacy, relevance, and responsiveness.
4. **Develop a plan of healing-centered engagement and recommendations for tribal members, families, educators, community organizations, and policymakers** for addressing trauma and improving the lives, well-being, success, equity, and justice of Native students.

II. The Whole Child Listening Session Process

The three listening sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, progressed from a basic framing of issues, concerns, and possible solutions in Session 1, to concerns over trauma and policy in Session 2, and a deeper dive into education, policy, and research in Session 3. Over the course of the three sessions, nine Native speakers addressed issues related to Native brilliance, Native language, trauma, and exemplary practices. They also spoke about legislation, policy, research, and coalition building.

The sessions were supported by a team of 18 facilitators, including staff from NIEA and CEI (See Appendix A for biographies of each of the presenters and a list of facilitators), with note-takers and recordings made of the sessions. However, these are the first steps. Before finalizing and advancing our recommendations, we must hear from Native youth and consider how to strengthen a communal approach to parenting and supporting the needs and development of each child.

Diana Cournoyer, Executive Director of the NIEA, introduced the first session and set the tone and priorities for the Whole Child Listening Sessions. She welcomed participants and explained its importance, emphasizing the need for a paradigm shift and the creation of learning systems that “embrace what we know, how we know it, and how we apply it.” She emphasized that educators must strive to meet children and youth’s social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, physical, and mental needs before turning to academic learning.

Ms. Cournoyer explained NIEA’s perspective and the pillars of their whole child model:

If every one of these pillars [advocacy, building tribal education capacity, wraparound services, post-secondary success, assessments and accountability, skilled educators and leaders, language and culture-based education, students, families, community stakeholders] or these areas of focus are efficient, effective, running well, through collaboration, through partnerships, and all of the little people you see in the middle.



Figure 1. NIEA framework.

Then our students, our families, and our communities will benefit, and we'll be creating these thriving spaces for families, students, and communities. The wheel does talk about addressing mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional needs, so that all of our Native students who are struggling have the ability to live in a thriving space.

The current system was designed for a different world. It was designed for a world that didn't even see us in existence. It was designed for a world where children, where people weren't allowed to have opinions, beliefs. It was designed at a time where stereotypes about us existed in books and in classrooms.

As illustrated in the NIEA model, education is supported by an interwoven system of actions to advance the health and well-being of Native education. However, as Ms. Cournoyer indicated, we need a paradigm shift to achieve goals for a better quality of life for Native students while advancing the education of all students— Native and Non-Native.

So, to create this paradigm shift, and everyone understands the paradigm shift is a huge lift, I'm asking you all to help us pick up a mountain. I'm asking for you all to swim against the current like the salmon do. I'm asking for you to help us stop the spinning of the world and shift it into a different direction, because that's what's going to have to happen mentally, emotionally, and physically, in our learning spaces. This paradigm shift is necessary to meet all of our students' needs, not just Native students'.

We must create learning systems, not education systems. We must create learning opportunities that embrace what we know, how we know it, and how we apply it. And I remind you all that this does include social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, physical, mental, and then academic. Not, "and academic," [it must be] "and then academic."



Partnership with the Center for Educational Improvement

The sessions represent not only the long-term efforts of NIEA, but also its more recent partnership with the Center for Educational Improvement (CEI) to address holistic needs through joining forces and building on CEI's work on Compassionate School Practices (Mason et al., 2021) and Heart Centered Learning in New England.

CEI's work is part of a federal project to improve the mental health of children in schools by building compassionate school practices for all students (Mason et al., 2019; 2021). In New England, CEI partnered with Yale University's Program for Recovery and Community Health on a school mental health initiative for the Region 1 Mental Health Technology Transfer Center funded by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Administration. For that project, 24 Fellows, including teachers, school administrators, school psychologists, and counselors from each of the six states, participated in professional development geared to improving mental health and well-being in their schools and districts. They then implemented individual projects and shared results as they networked to problem solve and monitor progress at their sites. The project also set up alliances with mental health providers and helped to facilitate collaboration between agencies and schools.

The Center for Educational Improvement (CEI)

CEI is dedicated to advancing a scientifically based approach to Heart Centered Learning® in schools, with a spotlight on practical approaches to nurturing resilience and compassion for self and others. Heart Centered Learning, as championed by the CEI in its work with educators, is "education that is not overly dependent upon a focus on rigid academic scheduling or expectations for academic growth, instead taking a holistic approach that encourages and fosters the five Cs of social-emotional learning (external focus) and mindfulness (internal focus)":

1. **Consciousness**
2. **Compassion**
3. **Confidence**
4. **Courage**
5. **Community**

Heart Centered Learning reflects recent neurological research that suggests strong evidence of neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to recover from stress (Davidson & Begley, 2013; Kaunhoven & Dorgee, 2017; Lazar et al., 2005).



The intent of turning to the Compassionate School Practices approach, as adapted for Native students, is to address the trauma and needs of Native children and youth through four compassionate pathways: prevention (trauma reduction), support, building resiliency, and developing protective factors.

As adapted for Native populations, Compassionate Healing Practices involve a connected and relational whole school/whole community approach whereby educators, through the knowledge and leadership of local Native people, collaborate with students and families to ensure that all have knowledge of how to prevent, reduce, and understand the emotional trauma which often leads to serious behavioral and emotional challenges and to establish appropriate supports to not only further education but also to reduce the impact of trauma that may be part of the lives of students.

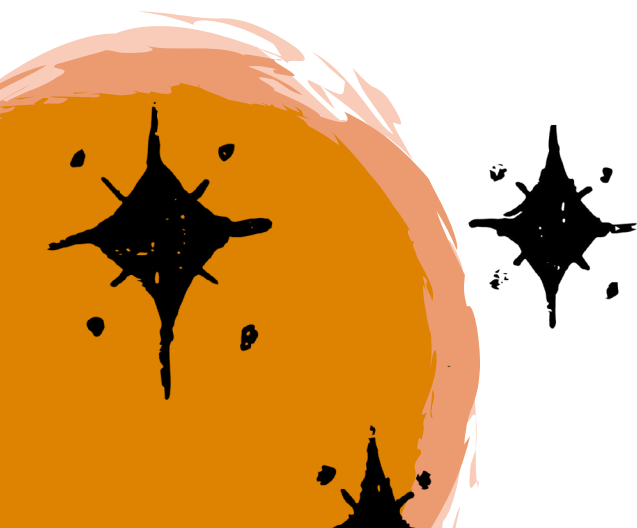
With an Indigenized model, tribal leaders contribute to recommendations and educators include Native practices and efforts to specifically create pathways for the needed healing of Native students and families that is a direct result of colonization and forced assimilation.

This approach must also help to further an understanding of the nature of historical and intergenerational trauma. Today's traumas are largely a culmination of social and emotional impacts of historical trauma on families, communities, and tribes, and to break cycles of shame, students and families need to understand the root causes of their trauma.

While therapy and counseling are certainly an important part of the equation, we recognize that there is much that educators can do in their day-to-day interactions with students and that with a model designed to meet the needs of Native students, these interactions can be enhanced through:

- Natural and other non-clinical supports are foundational for Native Communities. This involves recognition and understanding of community, local, and tribal beliefs, norms, and values.
- Introducing classroom lessons that build resiliency and also use strategies such as restorative justice rather than punitive discipline to help develop protective factors. Resiliency for Native students can also be increased through incorporating Native traditions and practices using a strengths-based approach.
- Enhancing protective factors for Native youth with educational sovereignty, tribal involvement, and explicit teaching.
- Creating space to cultivate foundational knowledge of education and educational sovereignty with tribes and tribal leaders.

The intent of turning to the Compassionate School Practices approach, as adapted for Native students, is to address the trauma and needs of Native children and youth through four compassionate pathways: prevention (trauma reduction), support, building resiliency, and developing protective factors.



III. Summary of Major Findings and Recommendations from the Listening Sessions

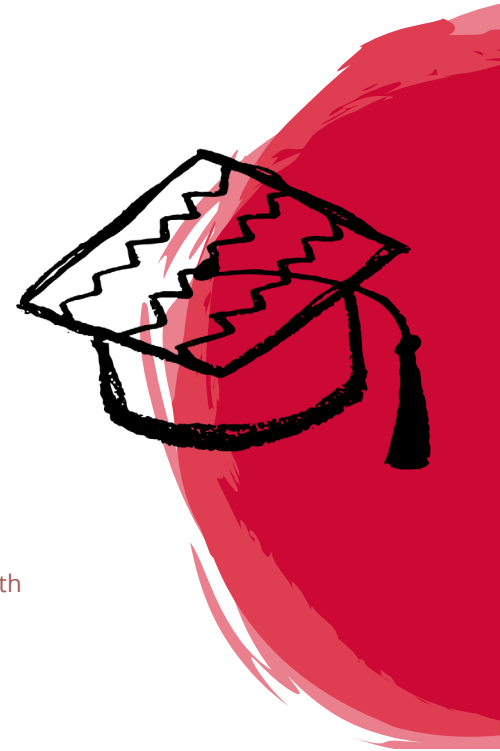
The recommendations from participants were based on authentic lived experiences, stories, and work as parents, families, educators, community members, tribal members, and stakeholders on long-standing issues faced by Native communities as they relate to the whole child and holistic wellness.

Registrants were asked to identify areas of concern. Across the three sessions, there were 546 responses. Several themes emerged, including concerns about:

- Furthering equity, inclusion, and antiracism
- Native voices not being heard
- Racism and systemic barriers that Native American students face
- Funding
- Educating students about truth – an accurate portrayal of history
- Lack of effective leadership and quality education
- Lack of resources for students and their families
- Community Engagement and educational understanding
- Student and family mental health and well-being
- Defining student success
- Providing for the well-being and mental health of Native children and youth
- Lack of parental involvement
- Lack of Native representation

Additionally, registrants made seven recommendations for the future of education for Native students:

- Build tribal education capacity
- Advocate for Native education
- Integrate Native culture and language into the curriculum
- Implement a cultural pedagogy supporting family dynamics of Native children
- Develop a whole child vision
- Foster identity and sense of belonging
- Create policy changes in public schools to honor Native preferences.



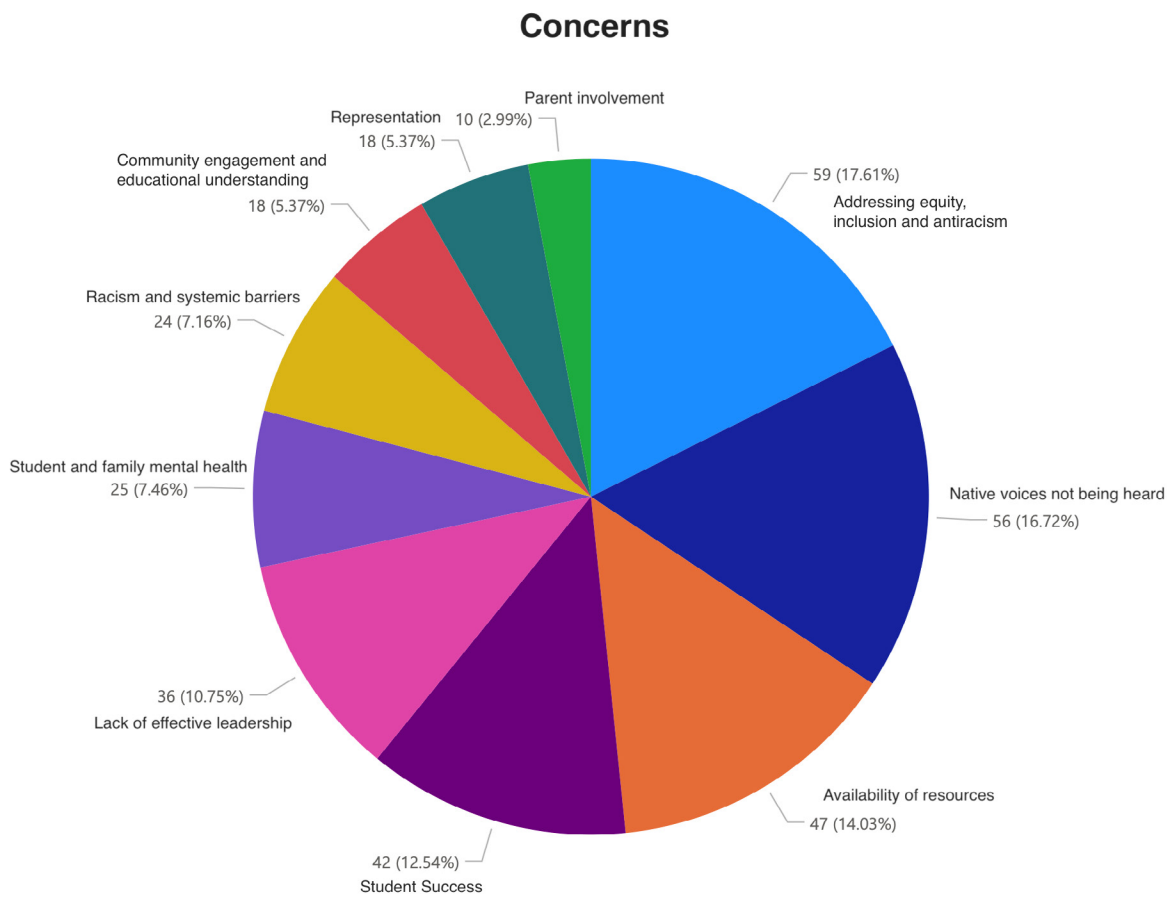


Figure 2. Concerns of Listening Session Registrants

When considering the educational needs and well-being of Native students, barriers to equitable education can be classified into three domains. These domains incorporate issues related to communities, families, and schools. (See Figure 3)

- **Communities** – the impact on communities, including the need for mental health services, language instruction, and the incorporation of Native tradition and practices.
- **Individuals and families** – intergenerational trauma, poverty, racism, and loss of cultural identity are all barriers to well-being. Need for programs to help develop parenting skills.
- **Schools** – including the lack of resources, staffing, and funding, as well as the high dropout rate of Native students; the enduring impact of boarding schools; teachers who are not prepared to teach Native students; inaccuracies in teaching about the history of Native people and individual tribes; the prevailing use of an institutionalized, Westernized version of American history; the erasure of Native traditions and language; disputes over Native jurisdiction; and policy-making and governance led by predominantly White, non-Native people.



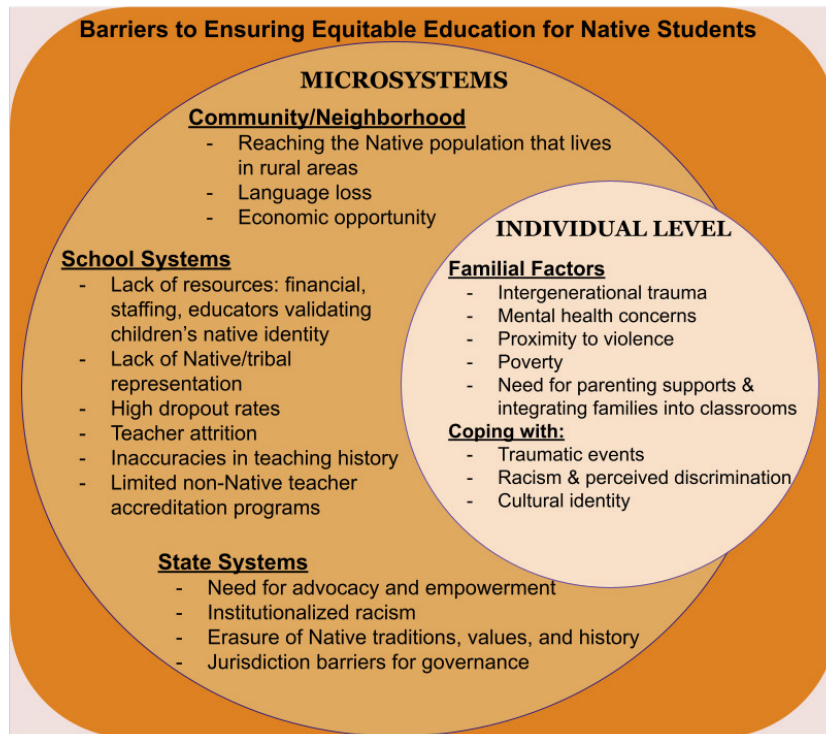


Figure 3. Barriers to Ensuring Equitable Education

Taken together, these spheres represent deep-seated bias, a lack of regard and respect for Native people, and substantial, long-standing policies to eradicate Native identity, control, and assimilate Native people into the colonized, institutionalized, westernized educational systems that were not built on the foundations of an equitable, inclusive, and diverse learning environment. Under these conditions, Native people have struggled to maintain their cultural traditions, to find ways to infuse the wisdom of elders, and to parent when many of today's parents, as unwilling victims of boarding school communities, were not parented themselves.

In the three listening sessions, participants also revealed eight common concerns related to education, Native practices, funding, and using institutionalized, westernized, and White-centric approaches, including the need to address:

- Better teacher preparation, awareness, and resources
- Disregard for and active erasure of Native traditions and history
- Mental health concerns
- The impact of racism, inequities, and unresolved generational trauma
- The loss of Native culture
- The loss of Native language
- Insufficient and inconsistent funding and resources
- The detrimental effect of westernized educational approaches, including an overemphasis on standardized assessments.

The recommendations in Table 1 below include suggestions for any learning environment engaging Native American communities, teacher training institutions, and agencies supporting Native youth. The following table summarizes specific feedback from participants in the listening sessions on the eight common concerns.

Table 1. Common Challenges and Recommendations

Common Challenges	Recommendations
<p>Insufficient teacher training and representation:</p> <p>Teachers undergo rigorous training programs to learn how to design lesson plans, manage challenging classroom behaviors, and set students up for academic and social-emotional success in and out of the classroom. However, most teacher training programs are designed with a Western education lens and do not consider how to best educate Native youth. Additionally, most teachers in the United States are not of Native descent, with an estimated <2% representing American Indian or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or of two or more races in 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2021). Native youth do not see themselves reflected in how their teachers are trained or their teachers’ cultural backgrounds.</p>	<p>Integrate training on Native brilliance and the Native experience in teacher training programs. Integrate Native brilliance and culturally competent strategies in teacher education programs to best prepare teachers to support their Indigenous students.</p> <p>Inform educator preparation pipelines and programs about culture-based and community-based education. Educational institutions (this is inclusive of state, LEAs, Federal, etc.) can learn from and partner with Native tribes and other subject-matter experts to ensure that teachers are given community, culture, linguistic, historical, and place-based continuing education and training on how to best educate and support Native youth.</p>
<p>Historical erasure of Native truths:</p> <p>In the Western education system in the United States, much of the curriculum glosses over the Native experience, including the harsh reality of how these people have been treated for centuries. As such, Native stories become lost, and Native youth do not see themselves represented in the curricula that they are taught.</p>	<p>Explicitly teach shared/tribal history. Many states mandate that shared/tribal history is taught in schools. Rather than glossing over the Native experience, educators through community based (i.e. place based and land based) education and culture-based education must integrate Native stories, perspectives, and histories into the curriculum that is taught each day. Integrating a Native lens into curricula is critical to ensure that Native stories are honored as part of history.</p> <p>With inclusion of Native history, coupled with cultural competency training, which is a component of culture-based education, all educators will be better able to understand the complexity of the history and historical intergenerational trauma that directly and indirectly affects Native people today.</p>
<p>Mental health concerns:</p> <p>Native people report experiencing severe psychological distress at a rate of 2.5 times greater than the general population (Azar et al., 2017). Early mental health intervention is critical for improving the livelihood of Native youth, and these interventions can and should exist where they spend most of their time: schools.</p>	<p>Provide wraparound student support in schools. Schools are the prevention arm of the mental health system and should be adequately resourced to deliver quality, wraparound student support. School counselors, social workers, and psychologists should be trained to deliver culturally competent, tiered mental health services to Indigenous youth.</p> <p>Offer dedicated after-school and summer programming to support the whole child. Schools should offer opportunities for all students to get involved in their community both after school and during summer vacation. Extracurricular enrichment activities help students feel more connected to the school community, a protective factor for positive mental health. Providing these opportunities for Native youth specifically tailored to their unique strengths and needs will help them stay connected to their cultures and build new memories with their peers.</p>

Common Challenges	Recommendations
<p>The significant impact of colonialism, long-standing intentional racism, discrimination, and inequities, including intergenerational trauma:</p> <p>Resources for families and early childhood education are needed to engage, implement, and create sustained shifts and the destigmatization of mental health and wellness. We often regulate the services and solutions for K-12, but the issues reach outside of the K-12 space and into prenatal care, early childhood, home visiting, wraparound, and continual services, and on the other side, adult education and community health supports for parents and adults.</p>	<p>Promote educational sovereignty, with local tribes having significant input into policies and practices and significant leadership of new programs. There must be a shared understanding at the tribal and community level about systemic change. Efforts must maximize and leverage tribal resources and stakeholder resources for holistic learning and supports.</p> <p>Tribal leaders and many in tribal communities “don’t know what they don’t know.” Many are unfamiliar with the terminology, concepts, and ideas like educational sovereignty. There must be a cultivated, equitable building of foundational knowledge for educational sovereignty to become a reality. We cannot assume that all know what sovereignty is, much less educational sovereignty.</p> <p>Develop a compassionate, Whole Child framework, with adequate access to wrap around and other community services, and use it to guide and evaluate the implementation of new programs.</p>
<p>Loss of Native Culture:</p> <p>Education has used intentional policies to assimilate and eradicate Native culture and language. Now, education systems have an opportunity to intentionally connect Native students to learn through their own culture, language, and prior knowledge.</p>	<p>Integrate culture-based education, culturally responsive and relevant education. Educators must offer substantial opportunities for students to connect with their cultural heritage through traditional ceremonies, language classes, and cultural history lessons. Develop related programs for teacher certification and training.</p> <p>Tribal and community collaboration and partnerships must be fostered to maximize and leverage resources and learning opportunities.</p> <p>Develop a framework that includes important essential understandings so tribes and tribal communities can adapt, implement, and connect the framework to their communities. This is important to note because we don’t want a “magic pill” but rather a flexible approach customized for the 574 federally recognized tribes.</p>
<p>Loss of Native language:</p> <p>As of 2018, there are 115 federally recognized Native languages in the United States. 99% of these languages are considered in danger of becoming extinct in the next generation (High Country News, 2019). While many Native families speak Native languages at home, most students are not exposed to teaching Native languages in schools. By not explicitly teaching Native languages, schools are complicit in the erasure of Native languages in the United States.</p>	<p>Provide programming and direct instruction in Native languages. Schools can fight against the erasure of Native languages by delivering direct instruction and programming in those languages. This can be done through games, enrichment activities, and guest lecturers from local tribal communities. Encouraging and fostering multilingual learners will help sustain the existence of Native languages in the US.</p> <p>Culture and language are inherently and intrinsically tied. In addition, culture and language are usually connected to place. Create opportunities to be integrated.</p> <p>Provide intergenerational learning opportunities. These reinforce stewardship and sense of collection and belonging.</p>



Common Challenges

Need for funding to improve Native education:

There is currently no unified approach to ensure that the improvement of Native education using Indigenous Research Methodology is continuously studied in the United States. Until proper resources are allocated to study deficits in Native education, little progress will be made in these efforts.

Standards-based education and assessments:

Many schools in the United States operate with a Westernized approach of standards-based education: students periodically take state-mandated assessments on topics such as science/technology, English literacy, and mathematics. School-wide results on these assessments may partially determine how a school is judged (i.e., exceeding/meeting expectations or underperforming) and what state-level funding they receive to “fix” any perceived shortcomings. This deficit-based approach does not take into account the lived experiences of Native youth who are not being treated equitably on standards that have nothing to do with their innate knowledge and Native Brilliance.

This approach does not account for equity, growth, and qualitative methodology in data collection.

Recommendations

Earmark state funding to study the improvement of Native education. School leaders and organizations in states with large Native populations should receive state funding to study the improvement of Native education. This could include needs assessments, research projects, and professional development opportunities.

Set aside a percentage of gaming monies to improve Native education. In many states, the money collected through tribal-owned casinos is largely unregulated. States can use their existing resources more efficiently by ensuring that a certain percentage of gaming money goes toward the improvement of Native education.

Advocate for policy changes for standards-based education and assessments. Much of what Native youth grow up learning from their families and communities (e.g., connection with the natural world, spirituality, survival skills, community, and family) are not measured on state assessments. Testing these students solely on the knowledge deemed important by a colonized, Western approach sends the message that Native Brilliance is not valued nor important. Educators can advocate for changing how students are evaluated, implementing standards that align with the typical Native experience.



IV. Model of the Whole Child Approach



Figure 4. Model of the Whole Child Approach

The model of the Whole Child Approach that underpins participants' recommendations in this report is based in part on discussions between key staff at NIEA and CEI. During the 18 months prior to the listening sessions, leaders from the two organizations reflected on how CEI's Compassionate School Practices approach could support the education of Native Students through an Indigenized approach to a compassionate school structure. These discussions helped clarify the critical nature of supporting Native students through efforts informed by tribal members dedicated to:

- Understanding Native brilliance
- Widely disseminating information on ancestral pedagogy and the critical importance of incorporating Native traditions into classrooms
- Broadening educators' understanding of the trauma faced by Native communities and designing educator training on the well-being of Native students and the role of schools in preventing more serious mental health issues (including reducing incidents of suicide, depression, and the use of alcohol and other addictive substances)
- Strengthening wraparound services
- Developing protective factors that strengthen relationships between children and caring adults
- Building the resiliency of Native children and youth

While these factors informed the organization of the sessions and the results, ultimately the results most reflect the mindset and input from the 250 participants and the comments of other registrants.

As depicted in Figure 4, findings from the listening sessions that inform this model were clustered under six major themes, including an emphasis on traditional Native practices, assuring tribal and Native sovereignty, and incorporating an array of mental health and community supports while ensuring that students receive encouragement in compassionate school environments.

FINDING #1: Promising educational practices for Native youth need to incorporate an understanding of (1a.) Native brilliance and (1b.) Ancestral pedagogy; (2) Teacher preparation and certification programs that help teachers understand and build on the significant contributions of Native people; (3) Integration of Native culture and languages; and (4) Native children’s Whole Child needs.

FINDING #2: Educational sovereignty is critical to effective and inclusive education. It is the ability, engagement, and sustainability of Native communities and tribes to determine, integrate, strategize, and control the life-long learning in their community. Non-Native educational stakeholders must be involved as allies rather than governing parties.

FINDING #3: State and regional initiatives that focus on building capacity for increased government-to-government relationships should honor the sovereign identities of Native nations, tribes, and Pueblos.

FINDING #4: Compassionate healing practices are essential to addressing long-standing and current inequities, injustice, and trauma, including the ongoing impact of intergenerational trauma. Healing is needed to fully restore the sense of well-being for Native children, youth, and their communities. By using systems of care that are inherent components of Native communities and culture, we can restore and revitalize those systems of care that have been disconnected or lost. Healing comes through validating and affirming identity.

FINDING #5: The unique experiences, strengths, and needs of individual tribes must be central to the education of Native youth. Native people want tribal fidelity and understanding regarding what is implemented in their communities rather than generalized approaches that minimize tribal-specific brilliance and alienate youth.

FINDING #6: More resources, better financing, research, and policy changes, as well as better maximization and leveraging of funds, are needed for community based programs to fully support the sovereignty and implementation of programs designed to strengthen Native children’s education and outcomes.



V. The Whole Child Initiative Findings

Section V. contains both a synopsis of the key findings and hyperlinks so readers can find in-depth information on the factors clustered under each.

The matrix below also gives readers a way to quickly get to the specific items under each cluster.

Allies and Relatives/ Coalition Building p. 102	Community Supports p. 73	Compassionate Healing Practices p. 57	Cultural Competence p. 35
Decolonization p. 48	Families p. 99	Federal Policies & Programs p. 98	Foster Care p. 68
H.E.A.R.T.+ p. 60	Heart Centered Learning p. 18	Increasing Tribal Liaisons p. 53	Integrating Native Culture and Traditions into the Classroom p. 39
Native Brilliance & Ancestral Pedagogy p. 30	Native Education for All p. 56	Native Language p. 55	Native Sovereignty p. 43
Prevention p. 72	Prioritizing Funding p. 92	Research & Development p. 89	Resiliency p. 78
Restorative Practices p. 74	School Mental Health p. 72	Social Emotional Learning p.83	State Legislation p. 84
Strengths Based Approach (Instead of Deficits Focus) p. 79	Teacher Preparation and Certification p. 38	The Whole Child Approach p. 26	Trauma p. 62
Truth & Healing Commission p. 91	Vision of CEI's Coalition p. 103	Washington State and South Dakota Decolonization Initiatives p. 53	Wraparound Supports p. 73

In the following pages, we include a more in-depth explanation of the findings surrounding each of the six overall themes reflected in the Whole Child Approach model. We also provide supporting definitions and descriptions of themes from expert researchers, educators, and Native American advocates.

Promising educational practices for Native youth



FINDING #1

FINDING #1: Promising educational practices for Native youth need to incorporate (1a) Native brilliance and (1b) Ancestral pedagogy; (2) Teacher preparation and certification programs that help teachers understand and build on the significant contributions of Native people; (3) Integration of Native culture and languages; and (4) An understanding of Native children's Whole Child needs.

Native brilliance and ancestral pedagogy are two interrelated concepts that inform Native sovereignty. Both approaches consider strengths of Native (or Indigenous) ways, “which come from living intimately with the land, working with resources surrounding that land base, and the relationships that it has fostered over time and place” (Battiste (Mi'kmaw), 2013, p. 33). From an Indigenous perspective, “knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge” (Wilson, 2008, p. 38).

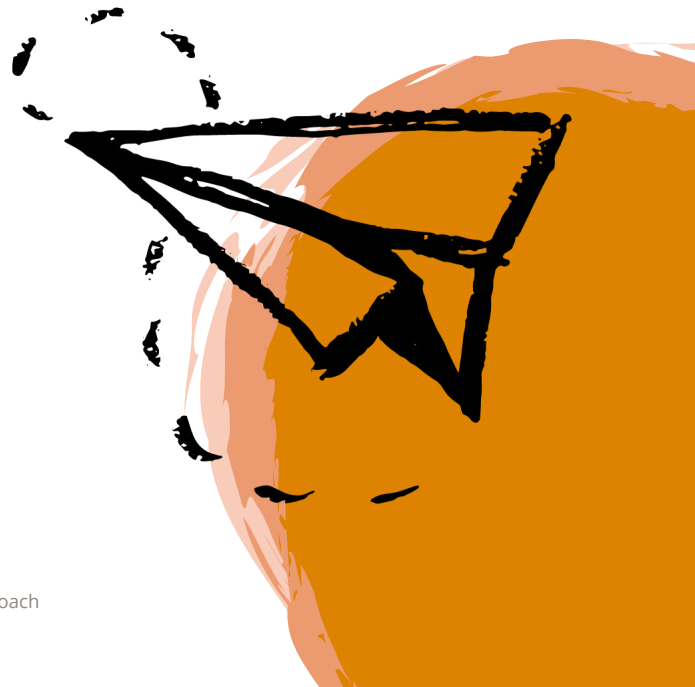
Native brilliance refers to the inherent wisdom, intelligence, strengths, resilience, innate resources, balance, and cultural richness within Native communities (UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, 2022; USET, 2021). It is essential to recognize how Native brilliance is deeply rooted in a North American Native worldview and impacted by historical dismissal and systemic eradication of Native brilliance via social dynamics and the federal government (UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, 2022).

Ancestral pedagogy is an approach that incorporates and informs pedagogy by integrating and utilizing community and intergenerational ways of healing that are inclusive of experiential practices that honor local tribal practices. It incorporates Native epistemological ways of knowing and passing knowledge and strategies to help students connect with each other, with others in their communities and beyond, and with plants, animals, and all life forms.

Strengths of Native Brilliance and Ancestral Pedagogy

An analysis of participants' remarks revealed five areas to leverage to support Native strengths.

- i. Understanding cultural competence
- ii. Emphasizing hands-on learning
- iii. Greater involvement of Native community members and Native teachers
- iv. Finding ways to integrate Native teachings and traditions while recognizing tribal differences
- v. Emphasizing interconnectedness



Native Language Considerations

Incorporating Native languages in school curricula will contribute to an increased sense of identity and connectedness. In addition, it can decrease the amount of stress Indigenous people face due to racism and identity issues and strengthen cultural identity, a protective factor (Allison-Burbank & Reid, 2023; Indian Health Service, 2002; LaFromboise & Fatemi, 2011). Additionally, implementing Native languages in the classroom creates a beneficial intersections where all students can discuss many things, including history, spirituality, and their mental, physical, and emotional health.



1a/1b Native Brilliance and Ancestral Pedagogy

Native Brilliance: “Native brilliance refers to the innate intelligence, balance, resources, and resilience by acknowledging the strengths of Native people.”

United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. (USET) December 2021

Native brilliance and ancestral pedagogy are two interrelated concepts that serve to establish parameters for Native sovereignty. Both approaches consider strengths of Native (or Indigenous), ways which come from living intimately with the land, working with resources surrounding that land base, and the relationships that it has fostered over time and place (Battiste (Mi'kmaw), 2013, p. 33). From an Indigenous perspective, “knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge” (Wilson, 2008, p. 38).

The concepts of Native brilliance and Ancestral pedagogy are embedded with the understanding of Native American axiology (values), epistemology (ways of knowing and sharing knowledge), pedagogy (methods and ways of teaching), and ontology (belief systems). Native brilliance serves as a framework for understanding from an individual, familial, parental, community, and tribal vantage point. Native brilliance is used in the mental health and substance fields. Its principles strongly overlap into education, where identity, mental health, and social emotional learning are not only needed within our educational learning environments, but they are hallmarks of how Native epistemology, or passing of knowledge has been engaged since time immemorial.

Native brilliance offers ways to inspire the exploration of identity through cultural and traditional knowledge in a community setting. It is built upon a strengths-based approach that safely provides space for individuals to engage their personal wellness in the areas of emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual belief, connection, exploration, and understanding. When this strength-based approach is nurtured in a safe space, and in this case an inclusive learning environment, it allows individual and collective brilliance to grow. Native Brilliance opens up the opportunity for exploration of identity, trauma, self-evaluation, and self-reflection.

When engaging with Native brilliance, we must be aware of individual, familial, community, and tribal differences in culture, beliefs, history, language, traditions, and values. A pan-Native American approach cannot be applied. Just as individuals have their own experiences, identities, and stories, so do tribes. Practical connections to the educational landscape, as well as intentional engagement of Native brilliance throughout a person’s growth, require sustained advocacy, nurturing, support, and understanding from home, school, community, and tribe. Educators’ understanding of Native brilliance is integral for Indigenizing their classrooms.

Ancestral pedagogy, conceptually, is similar to intergenerational learning. It also has very strong ties to community-based learning, place-based learning, and cultural competency. For Native people, the inherent and spiritual tie to the environment (Air, Land, Life, and Sky) is vital to our language, knowledge, and stories. For this reason, it is of importance to explore and understand Indigenous epistemology so that the specific ways of knowing, passing, sharing, and keeping familial, community and tribal knowledge are used as educational, instructional, and teaching methods in any learning environments, whether the learning is at home or in a school.



Ancestral pedagogy has faced challenges, such as intergenerational trauma that Native Americans have experienced in the United States since colonization, and it has altered and shifted ways of passing knowledge (epistemology). We must acknowledge, learn, and understand the history, historical trauma, and intergenerational effects that have impacted Native Americans since colonization. The impacts are felt in ancestral pedagogy, but our culture and gifts from our ancestors are present, persevering, sustaining, and thriving.

Ancestral pedagogy and Native brilliance converge when we examine ourselves at the individual level, and we realize that many outside factors have impacted our wellness and identity. Our personal wellness is our own, and it is up to the individual to nurture their personal wellness. However, by self-exploration, individuals can begin to understand that ancestral pedagogy and familial, community, and tribal beliefs, history, language, traditions, and values help educators realize, understand, and use Native brilliance to build and strengthen, as well as validate and affirm, identity for Native students and the educators who guide them.

1.a. Native Brilliance

Native brilliance refers to the inherent wisdom, intelligence, strengths, resilience, innate resources, balance, and cultural richness that exist within Native communities (UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, 2022; USET, 2021). It is essential to recognize the way Native brilliance is deeply rooted in a North America Native worldview, and impacted by historical dismissal, and systemic eradication of Native brilliance via social dynamics and the federal government (UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, 2022).

Reclaiming Native Psychological Brilliance, a Webinar series with Holly Echo-Hawk offered as part of the New England Mental Health Technology Transfer Center emphasizes healing through traditional Native and spiritual healing and recognizing the inherent racism and limitations of Western theories and science (New England MHTTC, 2023).

Structural and systemic barriers to understanding Native brilliance, including racism, systemic oppression, negative messaging, and trauma, impede efforts to foster and empower the brilliance and self-assurance in Native children (UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, 2022). The Native voice and Native perspective challenge the current Westernized worldview, and it is essential to listen and lean into Native Psychology by decolonizing, reclaiming, and acknowledging history, beliefs, spirituality, well-being, and traditions.

In describing the gifts of Native youth, participants reported personally observed evidence of Native brilliance:

- Native youth are great problem-solvers as they have learned to navigate more complex knowledge systems and multiple worlds (the two world concept states that Natives live in two worlds, their own Native world and mainstream/Westernized world, that have distinct differences in beliefs, experience, norms, and values).
- They have a connection to the earth/land/place and traditional medicines, as well as spiritual places and spaces.
- Youth have many gifts - they are very artistic and good at sports.
- Native students are inquisitive learners, which points to their brilliance.
- Native students are especially creative in the arts and on social platforms as evidenced during the Covid pandemic when they posted messages about their cultural dances, regalia, and languages.

1.b. Ancestral pedagogy.

Ancestral pedagogy is supported by the vision and work of educator, poet, scientist, and author Lyla June who helped to frame the group's understanding of ancestral pedagogy. As Lyla June has stated:

My people tend towards a pedagogical style that is: intergenerational, geographically decentralized, experiential, ceremonial, ecological, traditional, communal, place-based, kinship-based, consensual, synergistic, healing, gendered, skills/craft-based, practical, outdoor, popular, methodical, systematic, self-led, self-sustaining, engaging, mobile, fun and easier to implement due to shared leadership and responsibility.

Her research into ancestral pedagogy

encourages Native Peoples to: 1) have faith in ourselves, each other and our ancestral curricula, 2) honor our traditional planning processes as effective organizing tools, 3) think outside the colonial education box, 4) consider the effects our teaching practices have on the natural world, and 5) practice and hone the profound art of sharing power.

– Lyla June, Master's thesis, published Fall 2017

To honor ancestral pedagogy, we need to realize that the traditional school schedule is not always academically ideal for Native students. During typical school hours, young people may be involved advantageously in the interconnected relationships and practical and spiritual needs of their place and community. Moreover, there is value in connecting students to their ancestors, ancestral connections, and family history.

Ways to Support Native Brilliance and Ancestral Pedagogy

In what areas could educators and schools use the concept of Native brilliance and leverage ancestral pedagogy? An analysis of participants' remarks revealed five strategies to support Native strengths:

- i. Understanding cultural competence
- ii. Emphasizing hands-on learning
- iii. Greater involvement of Native community members and Native teachers
- iv. Finding ways to integrate Native teachings and traditions while recognizing tribal differences
- v. Emphasizing interconnectedness



i. Understanding cultural competence. This is inclusive of understanding intergenerational impositions and building relationships using systems of care that are already a part of native communities and culture, but also revitalizing those systems of care that have been disconnected or lost. Many times, healing comes through identity. A participant explained how it is important to consider Native students' learning styles and adapt accordingly:

We need to know how our (Native) students learn? Our students' learning style is different than non-Indian students... my observations are that students don't tend to show their work in front of everybody. [They are not comfortable] until they know what they are doing. They are likely to just not do it if they don't know how. We need to teach that it is ok to make a mistake, we need to learn what non-Indians teach and non-Indian teachers need to learn how we teach our children.

Example: Embracing Failure as a Part of the Learning Process. During the listening sessions, one participant explained a need for multiple means of evaluating students and embracing failure as a part of learning (i.e., grading and evaluation are steeped in Western colonial thought. We teach students that failure is a part of the process and that they are not defined by a grade.)

ii. Greater use of hands-on, project based learning. Native students thrive when instruction leans towards activities that connect students with nature and their tribal wisdom; where they use their minds and hands to connect, develop, build, and invent; and they are given opportunities to problem solve in projects that are aligned and connected with their belief systems and are relevant, useful, and based on local ecology and human need. Project based learning allows students to make their own connections and use their skill sets and understandings to customize the learning to their experiences, prior knowledge, and academic equity.

iii. Revise to Teaching by Native community members. A non-tribal citizen, who works with tribal post-pandemic operations, brought a cultural specialist into the classroom to observe the way that she speaks to her ancestors and how her ancestors are speaking through her in the classroom. She encourages educators to create a space for helping students to connect with their ancestral heritage,

In the dominant culture we are conditioned into only thinking of ourselves, and our individual success or failures. And instead we need to be thinking about all the ways we are we connected to our communities, families, and tribes. But we are also connected to the generations and [Tribal Nation] ancestors who have come before us. This moves us into the future and helps us stay connected and sharing.

What we are seeing in our networks is that best practices for [the Tribal Nation] students are similar to best practices for all students. [However, Tribal Nation distinctions are important; for example, the words for Mom and Dad are the same as the ones for Aunt and Uncle in the language, and observing the specialist's specific communication creates a deeply personal example for the students, rather than a generic "Indian" stereotype.]



iv. Hiring Native teachers and involving families and community members in traditions. Reflections of a Native counselor highlight the value of connecting with Tribal language and culture:

Native students relocated to other states, but students came back home to take Native American studies classes and stated how “now I know I like going to class . . .now I understand why my non-Indian friends liked high school so much...I know why they didn’t miss class, now I like taking classes taught by Natives.” They didn’t have to sift through what other professors were saying.... or try to change perspectives to try to make it fit....their situation.

So, I go back to our BIE schools. If we had more teachers from our communities that our students could relate to... material would be presented in a way they understand, such as entrance exams or word problems. They are not commonplace for our students. I taught at a Tribal language immersion school, and it was fascinating to have a Native language person teaching with me.

v. Teaching about Interconnections. Native people in many communities and traditions have respect and reverence for the larger picture and interconnectedness of humans and spirit. In many Native communities, the family and village are valued, as reflected in the language itself. It is a common theme amongst Native people that the earth, spirit, plant and animal kingdoms, and humans are all connected physically and spiritually. It is important to respect these beliefs, traditions, and spaces. As one participant said, “When we respect people’s spaces and places as sacred, we treat them differently.”

Another participant described a need to prioritize fundamental human values and connection as the foundation of education. This refocusing can improve student and community attitudes and make education feel more relevant and valuable:

Teaching for humanity and connection, not merely academic achievement. (i.e.,not merely academic achievement. Stop expecting us to assimilate! A tenacious point of view that educators must overcome is that “In America our children attend dehumanizing machines disguised as schools.”)

Connecting to the Community: Strategies that Work

Participants shared a variety of strategies and practices that have worked for them.

- **A Year Off for Cultural Building/Learning.** A school system in one of the pueblos in New Mexico provides cultural leave from school for the young men who take the year off for cultural building/learning. The school also schedules additional classes to teach the students how to build the adobes, aligning cultural learning to the school.
- **Aligning School Calendars to Support Cultural Events.** Schools that value culture and foster brilliance align their school calendars to support the ceremonies and cultural events of the community.
- **Multigenerational podcasts or communications.** These projects can help bridge the gap between elders/knowledge keepers and youth.
- **Extracurriculars.** Offer extracurricular activities to engage students that emphasize culture, community, language, etc.

Other strategies:

- Provide peer mentoring opportunities
- Allow students to create and honor their own norms and values
- Foster experiential, hands-on learning experiences
- Include tribes in developing curricula because they are the subject-matter experts

Barriers. In addition to these recommendations, participants identified several significant barriers and challenges specific to nurturing Native brilliance and ancestral pedagogy:

- Students lack understanding of their Native language
- Misinformation and disinformation about Natives and Native history are taught in the classroom
- Lack of parent engagement
- Jurisdiction barriers for governance
- Reaching the Native population that lives in rural areas
- Inaccuracies in teaching history. For example, a high school teacher shared, "I asked my students about the US Presidents and what they thought their relationship was with US Tribes. As the students researched each president, they came to realize that what the school textbooks contained was not the full truth."



2. Teacher Preparation and Awareness in Support of Native Educational Values

Teacher preparation programs in several states currently offer options for coursework and/or certification in Native practices.

Professional development is needed for all educators that builds on the already existing skills of educators. Here are two comments from participants:

- I think building protective factors really requires everybody to be on the same page in that regard. So many of the teachers have no training at all. It's not their fault. They've got their teaching degree with no information about American Indians and no real experience with American Indian people. So, a lot of them are running on, for example, stereotypes or a personal experience and not recognizing that each tribe is different, each family's different, each child is different. So, I think professional development for everyone involved is probably the number one remedy for providing some built-in protections for our students that we all understand and are trained on, and we really make a commitment to be well-prepared and well set up before it even happens because we know what's going to happen.
- When we talk about teacher prep, teachers in schools, teacher preparation in schools, and the lack of adequate preparation to meet the needs of Native students across the board, across the country, it made me wonder that on a policy side of things, to what degree is NIA engaging with state departments of education that might be able to identify the school districts? Given that 93% of Native students are in public schools, identify the school districts with the highest percentages or significant percentages proportionally of Native students, and then target them for some targeted technical assistance and professional development supports around meeting the needs of Native students to really help teachers feel like they help.

In a Western state, one participant described a “cultural teaching certificate that is available for tribes to certify their cultural educators, and it goes through our state’s education system, and it’s a legitimate parity teaching certificate. Part of that requires a lot of tribes to develop ongoing capacities, a good problem to have, to have countless districts now clamoring for language programs in their districts, at least out here...”

Another example can be found in New Mexico, where they have implemented a Native language certification program which “authorizes individuals to teach the native language and cultures of specific tribes and pueblos in any grade K through 12” (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2023).



Non-Western Routes for Accreditation. A participant expressed the difficulties in ensuring that teachers understand more about Native ways so that they are better able to support their cultural heritage.

Currently, a non-western accreditation route does not exist. Teacher certifications and ‘highly qualified ratings’ masquerade as gatekeepers, placing unnecessary barriers in the path of excellent Native teachers. Something must be done about this.

Supporting Native Students Across the Array of Schools, Public and Private. According to an education and talent recruiter in a Western state,

We need to develop educators who will work in our communities, not just in the classroom. At the same time, we need to challenge communities to support our schools wherever they may be, whether it be a public school in an urban setting, reservation school, or residential school. We also need to help our families become and remain engaged. Families need to become a part of the institution. School is the heart of the community. Students need to see family members engaged in their education, not just at home. So many talented students. As a teacher, helping students to realize their dreams and share how valuable it is to become an educator today.

3. Integrating Native Culture and Language into the Classroom

Integrating and teaching Native culture and language into local curricula is another powerful way to preserve and promote Native culture and have Native children see themselves reflected in schools. Several participants described how they are spotlighting Native stories within the educational curriculum, providing targeted interventions for the mental illness and substance abuse issues that adversely affect Native populations, and leaning on the community to provide positive role models to Native youth. At the national level, various legislation and appropriations have been passed to support Native languages. The Esther Martinez Act is a vital part of this for Native American languages.

One participant shared how they, together with their colleagues, created a workbook with two Native languages and three dialects. Using these workbooks, educators video conference with schools from their district and play a game they’ve created where they can hear audio in Native languages/dialects to facilitate learning classroom vocabulary and phrases. This practice not only helps students learn Native languages, but also empowers teachers with their culturally competent instructional practices.

The Native American Community Academy Charter School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, has language classes three times a week. “And so, our kids, they’re sponges, they take in the words, and they know... Sometimes, they correct us,” says a teacher from the school.

Many educators and schools are not versed and/or trained in connecting culture and language to modes of learning. It is very easy to get caught up in what might be described as “the beads and feathers” effect, an approach that trivializes Native culture and traditions. There must be intentionality and connectedness to learning from the context of the local tribe and community.

Reviving and Preserving Native Culture and Languages

Christina Goodson, a Tribal education specialist with NIEA, presented several diagrams depicting the relationship between Native language, tribal traditions, culture, regard for the earth and nature, and health and well-being. She explained that language connects people with their history, land, and spirituality, which are the foundations of personal and community wellness, as well as the ethics and morals of the community. These connections support the mental, physical, and emotional health of Native people.

Christina referred to ancestral knowledge. Native ancestors knew how to live healthy lives on this land, and much of their knowledge is embedded in Native languages. By learning Native languages and being on the land, we can reconnect to our traditional healthy lifestyles.

Moreover, when students have opportunities to learn their Native language, there is a decrease in Native youth suicide rates (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998), and programs on maintaining one's Native Language are associated with lower rates of diabetes in some First Nations communities (Grier et al., 2014). Native language also supports academic achievement and the ability to remain strong in the face of overwhelming challenges (Christian et al., 2015).

Develop Community Language Programs for All Ages

Language programs ideally should start at a young age. Young children learn new languages faster and easier than adults. Early learning sets children on a path of strong cultural connection. But although early learning is ideal, it is important that everyone in the community has opportunities to learn the language. Language programs are a way of bringing the community together to improve the unity and health of the community.

Our languages teach us who we are and how to live well in this world. Language and culture provide healing and build strong identities as Native people. Community-based programs that pass on language and traditional knowledge will help build positive identities and resilience for community members of all ages. One participant explained how educators in one state are certified in Native language instruction:

[They] are placing more value on this than we do on the mainland. We are doing our best just to get language instructors certified, assess students in bi-literacy certificate. If we can get this done, students will get credit, and this credit will carry over to the University to have foreign language credit acknowledged. This will take several years to do. We have to find funding to support language teachers. This is important. We don't want to lose this knowledge. We should share the cost due to language loss.

Limitations: It is difficult to teach Native languages within the colonized education system that has become the norm with mainstream education.



A faculty member in early childhood education at SIPI in Albuquerque points to the importance of changing the system so that it meets the needs of Native people, which would mean integrating people back into their language and culture because colonization has severely impacted their self-esteem and connection to their roots.

I think there's some healing that needs to be done, and there needs to be some acknowledgement of that, because many of our urban relatives are carrying that weight of not being connected to ancestral lands. And also, we sort of are putting the blame on them for not knowing their language and culture.

So, there needs to be a change in terms of the way that we are creating these systems, and to also really, realistically look at the numbers. Where are our children? I think about my son and he's going into the public school with thousands of other kids, and how is it that we're going to meet those needs? And it may not be an immersion program, but could it be even, from a Native perspective, socially bringing people back into their language and culture when we know that colonization has had its impact on their self-esteem and their ability to connect with language and culture.

Another participant from Spokane described the difficulties in introducing Spokane Salish language into the public school system.

So, one of the things is, in regard to where we're at, I'm in Spokane, so our Spokane public schools have at times tried introducing Spokane Salish language into the school system, the curriculum. But the problem is, it's not suitable. It doesn't fit because it's not geared to work within the colonized white supremacist values in the structure that they want our youth to learn.

A participant from Alaska, now living in Arizona, was instrumental in creating an independent tribal school that is owned and operated by the tribe. Ninety percent of his student population is Navajo, so the educators focus heavily on integrating Navajo language into the curriculum from the time that students are in Pre-K. In his view, colonization "took away language and culture and so schools should do their parts to put that back, quite frankly, and honor and prioritize that."

Convening Families and Students

Beth Geiger, of Alaska, is the Washington director for Region 16 Comprehensive Center. During one session, Beth explained how Share Our Voices, Hear Our Stories (SOV HOS) is a series of forums designed to convene Native American and Alaska Native families and students from across Washington (and beyond) to inform efforts in Native education. The Region 16 Comprehensive Center (R16CC), one of the 19 centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education to support states in enhancing student success, hosts these forums. This series is a product of the R16CC WA Tribal Advisory Board's commitment to ensure that the field of education recognizes families as the experts on their students' needs and successes.

The series grew out of the idea of creating safe spaces where Native families can talk about needs without educational administrators coming in and interpreting or putting words in people's mouths or taking over the leadership for any planned actions. The forums encouraged sharing of stories in education. Beth ended by saying that while this work is federally subsidized, the conversations really need to push beyond state boundaries.

Curriculum

Participants emphasized a need to modify goals and activities within school curricula to be land-based, Indigenized (with accurate histories), and inclusive of Native culture, with tribe submitted/approved curriculum or trainings that accompany academic curriculum. However, Native language resources, including curricula, must be determined by the communities. They must meet the needs, wants, and methods that the tribe and community deem necessary and have fidelity to tribal values.

Obstacles to Integrating of Native Culture and Language in Curricula

- Colonization and erasure of tribal knowledge and culture that is not acknowledged; refusal to recognize multiple ways of knowing
- Native communities are burdened with funding corresponding training for curriculum
- Native languages cannot fit within the White-centric teaching curriculum, although language learning can bring healing through reconnection with culture and identity and can provide a foothold in educational progress.

Language and culture curriculum is especially of concern for children who are adopted or have adopted parents

- Cultural teaching certificates are needed (Washington is a positive model and New Mexico has a robust Native Language certification program.)

Decolonize teacher accreditation

- Teachers are not prepared to instruct Native students. We need to Indigenize teacher training.



Educational Sovereignty



FINDING #2

FINDING #2: Educational sovereignty is key to effective and inclusive education. It is the ability, engagement, and sustainability of Native communities and tribes to determine, integrate, strategize, and control the life-long learning in their community. Non-Native educational stakeholders must be involved as allies rather than governing parties.

Colonization sought to erase the Native American culture, history, language, traditions, and existence, and its effects are felt heavily at the school level. In addition, assimilation efforts have had a profound direct and indirect effect on perceptions of education. Without a clear sense of direction or unified approach for preserving Native values in our schools, we are at risk of further destroying many intricate and essential Native cultures in our society. Educators and policymakers must take a critical look at how Native schools are operating and recognize that they are judged by outdated and inappropriate measures that put the emphasis on Westernized, non-Native values and academic achievement.

By better equipping teachers to support Native learners, we can build a more compassionate school environment that values diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility for all. Educators should partner with community members, integrate traditional Native knowledge and language into the curriculum, and lean into social and emotional (SEL) and 21st Century learning skills to support Native students and build their resilience.

Educators and policymakers must take a critical look at how Native schools are operating and recognize that they are judged by outdated and inappropriate measures that put the emphasis on Westernized, non-Native values and academic achievement.



Participants presented a rationale, based on long-standing trauma and the elimination of Native rights, for insisting on the critical and compelling call to practice Native educational sovereignty. For example, one participant described the harm to student self-esteem that may come from repeatedly being measured against norms foreign to one's community and upbringing,

Our kids are facing PTSD every single day when they're going into these spaces at school and they're being told that they're not of value and they're not of worth, and that the world either views them as just a resource or as an impediment to white supremacy becoming to full fruition.

Another participant encouraged NIEA to continue its advocacy efforts. Many participants brought passion and powerful ideas for change to the conversations, but felt discouraged by conflict and disagreements with their state governments and school boards. These individuals have made positive changes in their communities but rely on NIEA to make policy change,

... all of this collective experience and knowledge that folks who are obviously passionate about this on this call, and I'm sure we'll get a lot more, as that creates some momentum. That can really help generate those policy ideas. And the more that we have a national momentum and force to it, the more we can leverage that in states that are really pushing back, if that makes sense.

Colonization is present in curriculum and school systems and contributes to the re-traumatization of Native youth, perpetuates negative stereotypes about Indigenous Nations, and attacks the positive and protective feelings that should accompany a cultural identity:

- So, one of the things is, in regard to where we're at, I'm in Spokane, so our Spokane public schools have at times tried introducing Spokane Salish language into the school system, the curriculum. But the problem is, it's not suitable. It doesn't fit because it's not geared to work within the colonized White supremacist values in the structure that they want our youth to learn.
- Right now, I find research that proves that the current standards are far too accelerated in the core topics of reading, writing and math, and damaging. And that's hard to come up with. Usually people just want to talk about, they feel like that's just too rebellious or it's like taboo even to consider that the standards are too high. Obviously, everybody always wants to put academic progress as what this is all about eventually, and I really need research that shows that that's not the case.



Schools contribute to the trauma of Native children and youth in many ways. A participant described how school curricula and instruction can further trauma through requiring student participation in “mission projects.” These projects were introduced as a way of understanding the role Spanish missions have in current Western US culture, architecture, religion, and art while excluding the key fact that the mission’s primary goal was converting the Indigenous peoples into “civilized” Spanish citizens and Christians. And that the Indigenous peoples were forcefully made to build and live on the missions (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2023; National Park Service, 2016).

I can say that with the school district that we are in specifically, there was an alliance with the local school district and the teacher’s union did put out a letter that they actually discouraged the mission projects that were detrimental to the Native American communities in [a Western State]. It was traumatic for the Indian students to relive those projects and actually have to build the missions, which were actually locations of trauma. Some teachers were okay with it, and receptive to it. We thought we were making progress and that teachers had stopped doing the mission projects. Although recently, this past school year we’re finding that it has resumed with actually some pushback of pushing them through. And so I think it’s always going to be an ongoing fight and an ongoing project to get allies. And my question is to you guys, especially up in Washington (state) of how you got your curriculum. I’m interested to see what that process looked like. I understand it’s probably a long process to actually create an entire curriculum. And how you got the boards on board with that (Since Time Immemorial Curriculum).

Other participants explained the differences between White-centric school systems and instances of Native sovereignty. There is a need for curricula designed from Native frameworks. For example, a school where teaching occurs in the manner of one’s elders might generate less school-based trauma and build resiliency for Native students,

I feel very fortunate that I was able to learn within a framework that was designed with our Native students in mind because they really tried to instill going back to teaching your Native communities. But that’s not the case at many predominantly White institutions across the country.



Moreover, continuous commitment and resources dedicated to serving and protecting Native students must be encouraged.

- We have a tribal school that we started this year and we have really focused on because it's fully owned by the tribe, run by the tribe. It focuses completely on the whole child, and we have a few more areas that are culturally based on the whole child but I'm looking forward to the research. We know it's good for our kids and we know they need it, and we're not subject to our state requirements here.
- ...we have everything within us to create and to educate our own people.
- I'm thinking in order to preserve and protect our programs that we have, we definitely have to advocate for our Indian child. And with our consortium that we work with, whether it's writing those letters and advocating for them anytime tribal consultation meetings are held, trying to be active in that and going to those tribal consultation meetings to let them know who we are and making those tribal contacts, partnerships, collaboration efforts so that we can have the tribal support as well to back the programs that are already existing and maybe new programs that might be able coming down the road here. I do know at one time a particular program was almost zeroed out and without the Indian ed directors going to these tribal consultation meetings and voicing for the Indian child, it was able to be saved. So really advocating for our Indian child from pre-Ks on up through higher ed. I'm a pre-K through 12th grade educator, so that's my emphasis, but all areas.

As the last speaker just stated, Native representation among key decision makers is critical, for it goes without saying, that a community and its leaders are the subject matter experts on their needs:

I think that we definitely need more Native representation with those individuals who make these decisions. So, when you see the panel of decision makers, how many Native representatives are there, and then make sure it's not just tribal leaders, but also those in the community. Because that's really where you're going to hear the true voices of the community, whenever you reach those individuals within the community and not just tribal leaders. Also in that legislation, include funding in there too, because I know for some states, they might have it in there that Native studies is mandated in the school system, but it's up to the Native community to fund that portion of the curriculum. And I think that funding needs to be included in any of those policies that's created for that.

Helping students understand Native culture is essential to their well-being. A part of the needed healing rests with healing a divide between Native peoples living in urban and rural areas:

- I think there's some healing that needs to be done, and there needs to be some acknowledgment of that, because many of our urban relatives are carrying that weight of not being connected to ancestral lands. And also, we sort of are putting the blame on them for not knowing their language and culture. So there needs to be a change in terms of the way that we are creating these systems, and to also really, realistically look at the numbers.
- Where are our children? I think about my son and he's going into the public school with thousands of other kids, and how is it that we're going to meet those needs? And maybe it may not be an immersion program, but could it be even just, from a Native perspective, socially bringing people back into their language and culture when we know that colonization has had its impact on their self-esteem and their ability to connect with language and culture.

Decolonizing

Destructive boarding school and assimilation practices persisted until the late 1970s, creating generations of Native families traumatized by the very education systems that promised opportunity to their peers. Today, Native youth continue to experience the impacts of these policies through historical and childhood trauma. Students continue to experience an education that is rooted in institutionalized and Western culture, beliefs, norms, and values, and it is largely disconnected from tribal communities and identities. Our students still attend classrooms where, a generation ago, their parents were punished for their languages, traditions, and cultures.

Destructive boarding school and assimilation practices persisted until the late 1970s, creating generations of Native families traumatized by the very education systems that promised opportunity to their peers. Today, Native youth continue to experience the impacts of these policies through historical and childhood trauma.

A part of educational sovereignty rests with identifying and using culturally sensitive practices. An educator at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center explains,

If we continue to attempt to implement SEL and Whole Child frameworks, it is counter-productive to neglect decolonizing work. The Indigenization of teacher training and curriculum is a protective factor because it makes schools more accessible for Native children to exist in and apply their knowledge and ways of being and belonging.

Inherently, all of the suggestions and methods proposed here are decolonizing because they do not conform to the dominant form of Western education that is the norm. This work also speaks to the challenges of helping Native young people navigate educational barriers:

I train clinicians in the treatment of childhood trauma in a culturally enhanced treatment modality. So, my position, I work with the Montana Office of Public Instruction in our Tribal Student Achievement Relations and Resiliency unit. A lot of the work that I do is focused on helping the schools that have been identified in the state as the lowest performing schools and a high majority of them are predominantly Native students. And it can get very discouraging and be challenging at times when we're having to work within these systems of standards that are really hard for us to try to meet when we have daily occurrences [with students] who are struggling to just get to school. So, it does get kind of discouraging sometimes when we're having to work within those frameworks and try to find ways around teacher quality. Are teachers prepared to educate Native students?

A Tribal Student Achievement Specialist in the Montana Office of Public Instruction collaborated with the Indian Education department to create a webinar series aimed at professional development for educators called "From History to Healing." The webinars focus on the Indian Boarding School Policy and cover a variety of topics ranging from ethnobotany to tribal sovereignty. These webinars are now available on the OPI Indian Education YouTube channel. In addition, she is involved in co-presenting a workshop on implementing a curriculum about boarding schools at the State Indian Education For All Best Practices Conference.

She explained:

We're really just trying to give educators the tools that they need to be able to teach these topics in a culturally relevant way and make sure that they are using appropriate resources and best practices as they do that implementation.

Her involvement reflects her dedication to advocating for measures that increase the well-being of Native communities. Not only should these practices be reinforced among teachers, but teachers should actively implement them in classrooms to help heal the impacts of colonialism on Native students. Providing relevant tools may promote cultural pride, foster engagement, and improve academic outcomes and retention among students, which can have a cascading effect on students' psychological well-being.

It is important for each tribe and state to engage in these types of teaching resources because each tribe and state has their own history and story. We can use these as models, but tribes and communities must advocate for these teaching resources at the local level because Indigenizing teacher and staff training and school curricula serve as protective factors. Making schools more accessible for Native children can decrease some of the adverse outcomes that befall them. Native youth should be able to reference and use their knowledge and ways of being at school, freely and safely.

During the sessions, participants mentioned several best practices from their experiences, including:

- Tribal schools, owned and operated by tribes with mentorship from community and tribal liaisons
- Healing trauma from boarding schools, family separation, and non-Native parents
- Teachers who are committed:

And we do have teachers here that are really invested in our community. We live on a reservation, but it's a state-funded school and our reservation paid for half of it. So, literally our community is a stakeholder in this school. But our voices are very limited.

Participants identified problems and potential solutions:

- I work for the school district in Santa Fe. I am dealing with a lot of the same issues that other people here are. We actually had a lawsuit against the state called Yazzie Martinez about the state's failure to provide support for Native American and low-income and special education students. And so far, all the state has done is kick the can down the road. Nothing's being done. So, you play by the rules, you go through the court system, you do everything you can, and nothing happens.
- Could maybe a portion of taxes, like our state taxes being specific for Native Indian education, or even with our casinos, [designate] our gaming monies. We have those compacts, the tribal state compacts, and a portion goes back to the state. So why not earmark that for Indian education to kind of go along with Title VI federal funding? Maybe that could be something that we can try... As far as legislation goes, why not have those gaming money that come from our tribal casinos go back to our Indian education maybe?



- One possible solution is renegotiating compacts:

I do know that what I was told when those compacts were made for the gaming education dollars, if they were not designated as that, then it just goes into a big pot at the state level. Because I did ask a particular tribal leader, "Could you not request whatever, 1%, 2% go designated to Indian education?" And if it was not designated like that, then it's not going to happen like that. I think that's how I was told and they already agreed to the compact. So I guess maybe asking our tribal leaders too, if they have to renegotiate tribal compacts, to try to request that, I'm not too sure. I'm not a tribal leader, so I'm not sure how that works with them.

Whether it is renegotiating with state governments, rewriting teacher accreditation and staff training programs, facilitating uncomfortable conversations about racism, or a combination of all of the above and then some, these practices contribute to decolonizing school systems and enabling positive learning experiences for Native youth. Broadening educators' understanding of Native communities' trauma helps prevent serious mental health issues in Native youth. Instilling Native pedagogy can rebuild the relationship between a school and its Tribal community, cease senseless trauma and retraumatization, and harbor proud and resilient Native Children.

When an institution faces racism and cultural erasure headfirst, step by step, an environment that formerly silenced Native youth may transform into one that relies on the students and their communities to create sovereign educational practices that enrich a learning experience for everyone. Practicing educational sovereignty allows Indigenous communities to exist in a space that was built with the intention of their assimilation and erasure. Without educational sovereignty or incorporating Tribal epistemologies, schools will continue to harm American Indian youth's cultural identities, well-being, resilience, and simultaneously negatively impact their communities.



State and Regional Initiatives



FINDING #3

FINDINGS

Finding #3: State and regional initiatives that focus attention on Native tribes' history, promote justice, and elevate Native culture and values can help realize educational sovereignty.

With NIEA's guidance and support, many Native communities are advocating for educational sovereignty, which is the right to decide what is taught in their children's schools, the ability of a community/tribe to determine the design and implement a system of learning that is centered around the communities' culture, history, language, beliefs, knowledge, and values. To support this sovereignty, Native communities are advocating for increased control on how funds are allocated and used in their communities. It is encouraging to see the many organizations recognizing the importance of Native people realizing their educational sovereignty and standing in solidarity with NIEA as allies and supporters of Native efforts.

The attention to factual history, sovereignty, and healing has a direct impact on the ability of educators and Native communities to address trauma and create atmospheres of hope and positivity in learning environments. By directly acknowledging the violence, broken trust, and inequities of the Native American experience and reclaiming the right to define and conduct education in a Whole Child framework, we can create and nurture a stable and trusted foundation for healing and progress may be created and nurtured.

Many Native communities are advocating for educational sovereignty, which is the right to decide what is taught in their children's schools, the ability of a community/tribe to determine the design and implement a system of learning that is centered around the communities' culture, history, language, beliefs, knowledge, and values.

The immediacy and unresolved nature of cultural traumas in students' present lives can challenge their ability to engage with the content and goals of the dominant culture's universal curricula. A first step in creating the capacity for educational success is building a sense of resiliency, safety, and self-respect that is rooted in recognition of the values of students' own communities. Reclaiming the cultural heritage that was disrupted by colonization must be a process that involves students as co-creators.



Increased tribal representation, tribal liaisons

Several states have now implemented legislation with funding to support place-related curriculum that is relevant to tribes in their region. Washington State's Since Time Immemorial curriculum is one example. One educator explained:

I am coming from Washington State where we have the Since Time Immemorial curriculum, which was an incredible step forward. But are teachers prepared to teach it? That's been an ongoing question in this state.

My colleagues who are in the Yukon-Koyukuk School District up in Alaska Interior of the Athabaskan area were unable to be at this listening session, so I'm representing their great work there to share. Holly, my friend who's a Native language teacher along with Susan Paskvan K'etsoo, does video conferencing three days a week with school groups in each of those schools from Fairbanks, where their district office is. And then they've been, lately she created a game. There's three games that they've been working on. And what's cool is they actually have audio for the QR codes on the cards where they do the game, so they can actually hear audio as they do the games also. And this year, we're actually working on five new units, which also include classroom vocabulary and phrases. So, this fall, we'll be doing a lot more in school that is very relevant to help support the teachers, to support the students doing more language every day.

Since Time Immemorial Instruction (SB 5433):

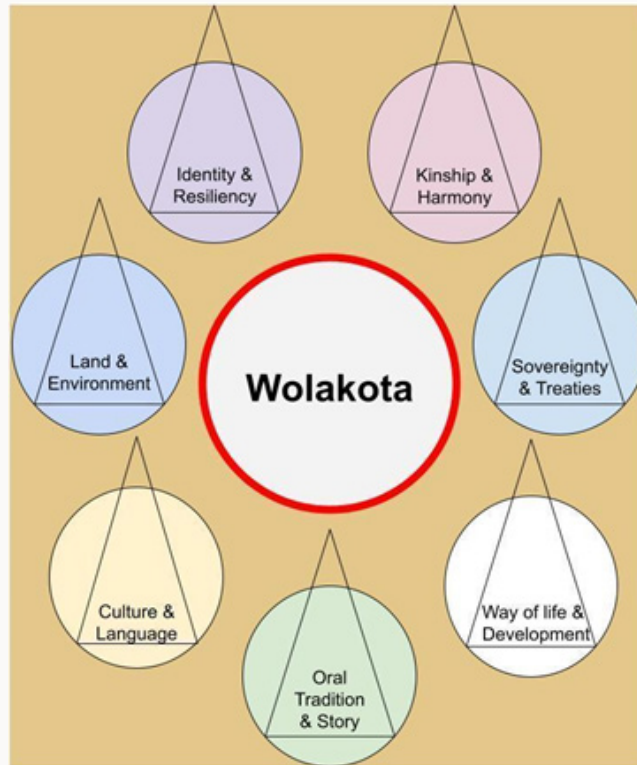
"In 2015, SB 5433 passed, requiring Washington school districts to incorporate Since Time Immemorial Tribal Sovereignty in Washington state, or Washington school districts to incorporate other lessons on the nearest federally recognized tribe's government, history, and culture.

Time Immemorial instruction is place-based, integrated, and raises questions such as consideration of the legal status of tribes who did not 'negotiate' for compensation in return for the loss of their sovereign homelands. Additionally, to prepare educators to instruct this material, teacher accreditation programs in Washington require candidates to demonstrate competency on intersectionality and integrate their cultural knowledge in their pedagogy.

Since the passage of STI, all of Washington's 29 federally recognized tribes endorse and provide information for common instruction, including "Ready to Go" lessons that have been shared by Tribes to provide teachers with quick access to a variety of grade-appropriate, complete lessons. (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.). Transforming teacher prep programs and school district requirements are all part of making schools a safer and more inclusive place for AN/Al students.

For a curriculum to work, it must be modified and connected to the local community and tribe. The crosswalk must be intentional and should be done by education partners that represent the community, school, and stakeholders. The limitations of any curriculum is that they may be rigid and prescriptive with little room for educators to adapt to their community and pedagogy. South Dakota's Oceti Sakowin curriculum is another example of how states are developing and implementing relevant curriculum.

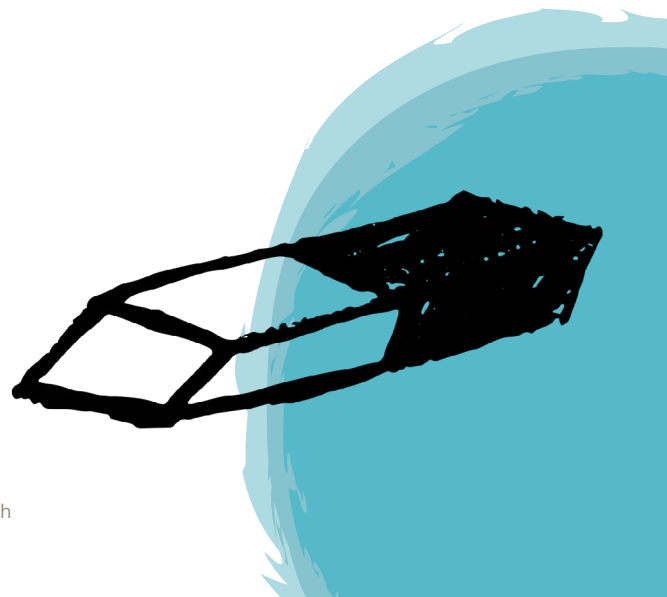
South Dakota has recently implemented a curriculum addressing tribal-specific history and culture of Native



Americans in South Dakota through the seven Oseti Sakowin Essential Understandings. Displayed in this figure:

The Wolakota Oseti Sakowin Essential understandings are presented with this quote from Oseti Sakowin elder Jace Decory,

“That’s the way I try to live my life in Wolakota — in peace, in balance, in harmony. It’s a philosophy, it’s a way of life...” every day, when you walk on earth you try to live in balance with whatever task you have at hand.



OSEU 3: CULTURE & LANGUAGE

Standard 3.1

Identify similarities and differences among the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota

Standard 3.1

Read *Home to Medicine Mountain* by Chiori Santiago and reflect on the impact of boarding schools on the Oceti Sakowin languages.

Develop a poster of Oceti Sakowin and name each band and dialects.

Create a diagram depicting the annual camp circle of the Oceti Sakowin bands in their assigned locations.

Standard 3.2

Describe efforts made by tribal members on and off the reservation to revitalize Oceti Sakowin languages.

Standard 3.2

Create a poster illustrating the meaning of the student's name.

Research names, English and Lakota/Dakota/Nakota, of Oceti Sakowin leaders and describe the meanings and origins of those names.

Develop a dictionary of contemporary words and phrases. Who uses these words/phrases that we are coming up with? Us today? Past lingo? (i.e., slang, text message language, etc.).

Investigate and report on educational efforts to revitalize Oceti Sakowin languages (i.e., collegiate, immersion schools, etc.).

Standard 3.3

Recall Oceti Sakowin sacred sites, creation stories, and star knowledge and describe how they relate to

Standard 3.3

Read the story *The Great Race of the Birds and Animals* by Paul Goble and have students draw a picture from the story (Suggestion- do not let students see the illustrations as you read the story. That way students come up with their own picture ideas)

<https://www.sdea.org/what-we-do/teaching-learning/oceti-sakowin-essential-understandings-standards>

Instruction in Native languages can further bodily health, emotional and spiritual health, and mental health. Christina Goodson, Tribal Education Specialist at NIEA, shared that in her classroom, she has seen language act as a bridge between these different aspects of health but also a bridge between students as a means for increasing understanding and cultural competence. Christina also referenced studies that suggest that language lowers rates of diabetes and youth suicide— language acts as a protective factor in numerous ways.

When considering state and regional needs, two participants spoke about concerns regarding instruction in Native languages:

- Our school district is more than 90% Navajo and so we have really wanted to wholeheartedly adopt whole child and holistic wellness in addition to being more centered on culture and language. So, one of the things that we're looking at is the 90-10 model on language verbalization and, normally, we look at that starting in elementary, but what we want to do is actually start it in Pre-K so that those kiddos have that from the get-go. One of our thought processes is that schools took away language and culture and so schools should do their parts to put that back, quite frankly, and honor and prioritize that.
- I think in terms of language learning across the board, we need to look at the spectrum. We need to be inclusive in terms of the spectrum and looking at the programs we're developing, and making sure that we have equity across programming as well. And if agreements need to be established with states, I think that that needs to happen, and NIEA, I think is a great organization to be that voice for us and really thinking about the equity in terms of every state is different in terms of their willingness or their ability, or their resources to do this work, so thank you so much.

One positive example of state mandated Native education is NEFA: Native Education for All. Presented during our final listening session, by Stephanie Hawk, a citizen of the Potawatomi nation and a NIEA Tribal State Policy Associate, NEFA is an educational movement spearheaded by Tribal Nations that has successfully implemented state legislation and policies that require or mandate Native education, subjects, and potentially, culturally relevant SEL. States such as Montana, Oregon, and Washington are currently implementing NEFA and NIEA is advocating for implementation in Arizona, North Dakota, and Minnesota.

Still, despite positive advancements in Washington state, Native education must be implemented by educators trained and prepared to teach it; this involves decolonizing teacher certification programs and reevaluating a school's priorities for academic achievement (a.k.a making room for Indigenous people to exist in a White-centric school system).

So while the legislation has been in place for a while, the curriculum has now existed and was developed with experts in the state, it didn't necessarily do much for the first many years because there were no consequences for complete inaction. And like I mentioned, people weren't necessarily trained. Even if people wanted to be implementing it, they didn't necessarily know how to do that in a good way. The past few years, since I've lived in WA, things have changed, that's really when some of those teeth have started to be added. So that is starting to make little pieces of change.

Overall, implementing Native Education, instruction in Native languages, or accurate Tribal histories may help Native youth begin to foster positive, personal cultural identities. When there is space for AI/AN youth to exist and make mistakes without fulfilling negative stereotypes about their community, productive and safe learning may begin. An integral part of creating these welcoming spaces is preparing teachers for their Indigenous students, transforming social studies and history curriculum into truthful accounts of history, and fostering a sense of respect for the First Nations and the Indigenous students' communities. But paramount to these points comes the consultation and leadership by the Tribal communities a school wishes to respect, celebrate, and understand.



Compassionate Healing Practices



FINDING #4

FINDING #4
Finding #4: Compassionate healing practices are essential to addressing long-standing and current inequities, injustice, and trauma, including the ongoing impact of intergenerational trauma. Healing is needed to fully restore the sense of well-being for Native children, youth, and their communities.

Native people have faced racism, genocide, assimilation, and trauma for centuries. Compassionate healing practices recognize the causes, symptoms, and outcomes of trauma and work to mitigate trauma's harmful impact. Compassionate healing practices can be fostered with Native practices that center on prevention, wraparound supports, building resiliency, and developing protective factors for Native children and youth.

A first step to realizing compassionate healing practices within a school is the paradigm shift to wanting to make schools safe places that reflect the values of its students. This shift takes conscious reflection, hope, and courage. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of a student body, it is vital to facilitate dialogue with the students and their communities.

Providing comprehensive and culturally relevant mental health services can help heal emotional wounds, and focusing on early intervention and building protective factors and resiliency can break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Integrating Native culture and language, cultivating community, building strong relationships, and building on students' strengths can increase resiliency and well-being.

Moreover, cultural competence and willingness to acknowledge intergenerational trauma are paramount to these prevention measures. Today's Indigenous students carry the hopes of their community, and their pain. Ranging from California's Mission projects to assimilatory boarding schools, schools were and continue to be a location for trauma for Indigenous communities. However, compassionate school practices have the potential to interrupt ongoing traumas and prevent re-traumatization. When an educator has the compassion and time to ask a student why they did not do their homework or why they are acting out, something amazing can happen. Besides a student receiving vital support from an adult, a door of understanding is opened between the student and teacher, and a deep relationship may grow. In NIEA's listening sessions, numerous educators, current and retired, shared their experiences with building meaningful connections with their students this way.

Compassionate healing practices can be fostered with Native practices that center on prevention, wraparound supports, building resiliency, and developing protective factors for Native children and youth.



Origins of the Whole Child Initiative

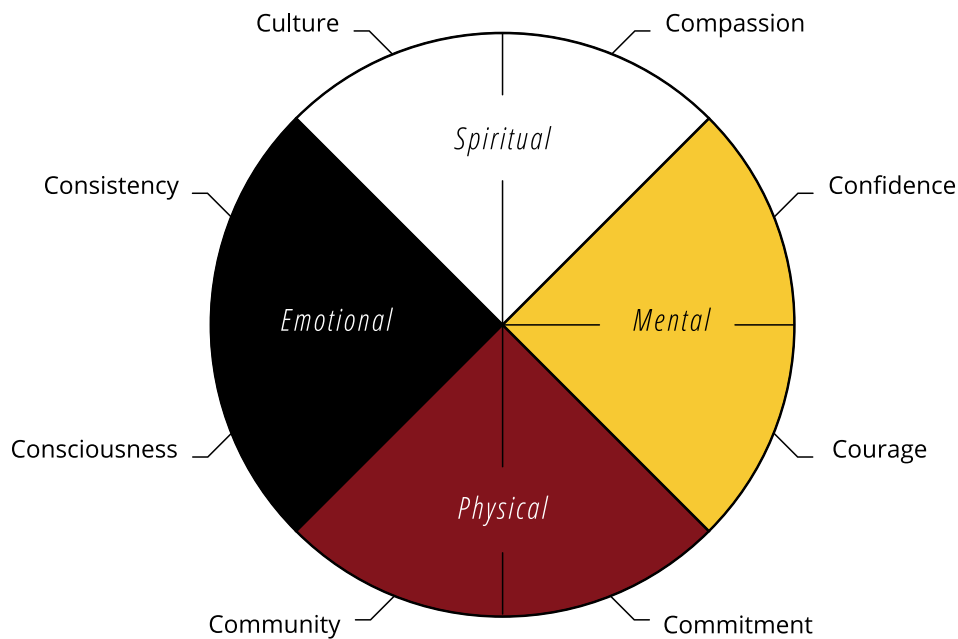
During the first session, Melanie Johnson, the Director of the Whole Child Initiative at NIEA, provided some background information on the program's purpose and intent, sharing the vision for educators that she and Holly Echo Hawk have developed:

It is for [educators] to really understand the strings and the resilience and the innate intelligence of Native people. You know we talk about envisioning this world in which all educators understand that their training is based in Western world views, and it supports superiority and lacks understanding of Native contributions to history and contemporary society. So, Holly was very instrumental in bringing this vision and centering us and envisioning a future where we, as educators and communities and students, are aware of what we know of the ancestral strengths of our Native youth, and that the innate intelligence of Native use is assumed in new and nurtured. Always assume brilliance.

The goal of the Whole Child Initiative is to create a framework or model that is part of the academic wheel closing gaps that address mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional needs that so many Native students are struggling to experience at one time. The Whole Child Initiative is centered around the needs and concerns of Native people.

The figure below shows an early draft of components of NIEA's Whole Child Initiative as it relates to a Native Medicine Wheel. The approach integrates Native values and emphasis on healing with CEI's Heart Centered Learning® by relating consciousness, compassion, courage, confidence, and community to the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional considerations for Native students. This interconnected frame sets the foundation for going beyond merely academic considerations to build student vitality and success.

Whole Child Initiative



HEART+

The focus on compassionate support and healing spanned all three listening sessions. During Session 2, Dr. Mason described the relevance of some recent work that she and a team of co-authors are undertaking as they research racism and young children. Dr. Orinthia Harris, a member of that team and a faculty member at CEI, developed the acronym H.E.A.R.T.+ to describe a way to combat racism. While introduced in Session 2, the concepts were reiterated in Session 3 and also are critical to finding ways to move forward and the recommendations for this report.

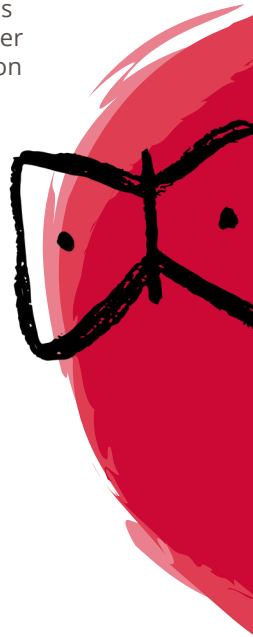
According to Harris:

- **H:** The work begins with Hope – having hope for the future.
- **E:** Next comes self-Education, making sure that we, individually, are educating ourselves regarding our own biases and the history and needs of people of color.
- **A:** The third step is Acknowledgment, acknowledging the trauma and inequities that people of color have experienced and continue to experience.
- **R:** The fourth step, Resolution, can take a variety of routes, but may involve legislation, payments for past and current suffering, or even taking steps to ensure that people of color are included in history books and that their contributions to science, literature, and the arts are acknowledged.
- **T:** Fifth is Teaching, teaching children about racism, bias, inequities, and solutions.
- **“+”:** Finally, the “+” is the added value of considering everything in the context of immediate circumstances, strengths, and needs.

For the Whole Child Initiative, part of the Hope is gleaned from these listening sessions, giving Native people the opportunity to voice their concerns and recommendations for improvement.

As the Center for Educational Improvement discovered in our prior work with Yale University’s Program for Recovery and Community Health in six New England States, there are many simple, inexpensive, and easy-to-implement strategies for promoting compassion through attention to what we call Heart Centered Learning. Heart Centered Learning and its five Cs (Mason et al., 2021):

- **Conscious awareness** of self and others
- Developing a **compassionate mindset**
- Building **confidence** to help elevate feelings of self-worth and individual and collective success
- Having the **courage** to make changes and address difficult and challenging dilemmas
- All within the context of building a compassionate **community** of learners within our schools



When considering the strengths and needs of Native communities, these heart centered elements can be reframed with an understanding of

- A **conscious awareness** and acknowledgement of the needs, the trauma, the ongoing inequities, and injustice, as well as the strength of Native peoples.
- How to infuse **compassionate healing practices** within education to build protective factors, prevent further trauma, and lead to resiliency and better access to needed services for children and families.
- Ways to build the **confidence**, agency, and sense of dignity and regard for self for Native children and youth.
- The **courage** of Native ancestors and Native people today, as well approaches to develop each individual child's mindset and skills to use their courage for individual and collective good.
- The inspiration and healing that comes in living in **communities** that act from a place of compassion and the will to prioritize the well-being of each member of that community.

In discussions with NIEA, it became clear that there is an inherent connection between the holistic heart centered visions and practices of both organizations. However, implementation will require structuring ways for Native people to lead this movement with the necessary policy and funding support.

Melanie Johnson described how “we are all survivors of trauma.”

Now, that we know the why...I wanted to take some time to ground those of you who may be triggered by what you hear today. We understand that there are many ,many stories of historical trauma, intergenerational trauma, and any unresolved grief that you hold, your families hold and your communities hold.

My brother and I have been working through our unresolved grief together, and my brother Ne-ba-to, likes to say that he is now a survivor of Historical Trauma. I think as we listen to each other today, we must understand that some of us are all in different phases of our healing journey, so just remember to please respect your phase and everyone else's phase, as we try to heal together toward solutions. Ketepi.

Members of these tribes are still experiencing unresolved grief and consequences of long-standing trauma from genocide, poverty, addiction, disease, forced separation of children from their parents and families, and experiences of children in Boarding Houses. This deep-seated trauma is compounded and spans generations. Native children are impacted by their own trauma, as well as the inherited trauma of their ancestors. Beyond their tragic effects on health and wellness of current generations, trauma and stress can inhibit the cognitive development of young minds. Members of these 574 tribes also continue to experience obstacles and disparities in access to education, health and rehabilitation services, education, as well as mental health supports.

For traumatized learners, educational success can be highly dependent upon the emotional and psychological qualities of the learning environment.

Trauma

The trauma experienced by Native people in the United States is pervasive. Much of the trauma began centuries ago with genocide, colonization, and the erasure of tribal knowledge and culture. This has had a profound impact on Native individuals' experience of trauma and prevalence of mental health concerns. Native populations experience higher exposure to trauma and development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than non-Native populations (Spillane et al., 2022). What's more, Native youth are 2.5 times more likely to experience a traumatic experience than their non-Native peers, and 22% of these youth experience PTSD, three times the rate experienced by the general population (Dorgan et al., 2014; Robin et al., 1996).

Many Native youth have experienced domestic or community violence, exposure to caregivers' alcoholism and addiction, discrimination, poverty, growing up in the foster care system, and exposure to mental illness and/or suicide. Exposure to traumatic experiences can have a life-long impact on an individual's health and experience in the world. If left untreated, trauma can continue to impact these individuals' children, grandchildren, and beyond.

The Importance of Acknowledging Trauma

Members of Native tribes still experience unresolved grief and consequences of long-standing trauma. Native children are impacted by their own trauma, as well as the inherited trauma of their ancestors. Beyond their tragic effects on the health and wellness of current generations, trauma and stress can inhibit the cognitive development of young minds. Additionally, members of these 574 tribes continue to experience obstacles and disparities in access to education, health and rehabilitation services, education, as well as mental health services.

For traumatized learners, educational success can be highly dependent upon the emotional and psychological qualities of the learning environment. Acknowledging trauma must be a part of the solution-building that is a major goal of NIEA's Whole Child Initiative.



Acknowledging the Effects of Intergenerational Trauma

Forced relocation, separation of children from their families, and the disruption of traditional language and cultural practices have had an ongoing negative impact on Native youth and their connection to their culture and their families, their sense of hope, and their experience of meaningful contribution (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017).

Such negative external factors have longstanding consequences, including increased substance abuse, mental illness, suicide risk, and family instability in Native communities (SAMHSA, 2018).

Intergenerational trauma has long lasting effects and leads to stress and anxiety, which often manifest as physical and mental health issues. Native Americans are at an increased risk for several health issues including:

- Mental illness and suicide
- Unintentional injuries
- Obesity
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Teenage pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stroke
- Liver disease
- Hepatitis
- Tuberculosis



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health, 2023; Beals et al, 2006.

Impact of Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma occurs when the trauma of an event is not resolved and is subsequently internalized and passed from one generation to the next through impaired parenting and lack of support or effective interventions. These types of traumas increase individuals' risks of experiencing traumatic stressors while also decreasing their opportunities to draw on the strengths of their culture, family, or community for social and emotional support. Youth cannot draw on the collective strength of tribal identity when much has been taken and there is little cohesiveness within the tribe, community, or family about who they are as tribal people and what is valued. (Bigfoot, 2007)

Exposure to traumatic experiences can have a life-long impact on an individual's health and experience in the world. If left untreated, they can continue to impact these individuals' children, grandchildren, and beyond. Alcoholism, domestic violence, and various forms of abuse are usually the result of root causes of trauma.

Because trauma disrupts education and wellness severely, we have highlighted two individual stories for a participant, and a Native student, David, the student. These stories represent the depth and scope of trauma discussed. Following the two stories are additional shorter comments and experiences from additional participants.

To help set the stage for a discussion of trauma in Native communities, Raquel Ramos, Prevention Specialist of NIEA's Whole Child Initiative, discussed reasons for examining behaviors and attitudes of youth through a "trauma-informed lens." She presented the story of David (adapted from Joyce Dorado, 2013).

David's Story Through a Trauma Lens

David is an 8th grade boy. He has been witnessing severe domestic violence between his parents since he was a baby. One night, in front of David, his father beat up and injured his mother so badly that a neighbor called the police. His father was handcuffed and taken away by the police, and his mother was taken in an ambulance to the hospital.

David slept little that night, terrified and anxious about what would happen to his mother and father. In the morning, David's neighbor took him to school. This morning, when he arrived at school, his teacher (who did not know about David's traumatic experience) asked him for his homework. When he did not have it, she expressed frustration and gave him detention as a consequence. David was upset and triggered by being in trouble with his teacher.


A short time later, a classmate accidentally bumped into David. Already triggered to some degree into a heightened state of vigilance (i.e., "survival" brain), this physical contact fully triggered David into a fight/flight reaction. David punched his classmate in the stomach. His teacher, upset by this outburst, began to yell at David to stop, which further escalated David. He began to scream, kick chairs, and hide under his desk.

After 10 minutes of trying to get David out from under the desk (during which time his teacher felt helpless and defeated, and the other children looked on in fear and frustration), David was brought to the principal's office and given a five day suspension for fighting and disruptive behavior, inadvertently exposing David not only to a major loss of instructional time, but also to a period of time during which he would have no refuge from the trauma and suffering in his home life. *Adapted from Joyce Dorado, (2013) Child and Adolescent Services, UCSF/SFGH.*

Participants later discussed in breakout rooms the potential for a better outcome for David if his teacher had been equipped with the training and awareness to view David's behavior through the lens of his trauma and use different tactics to calm and support him.

An American Indian Woman's Story

A 50-year-old American Indian woman recounts her experience with unresolved childhood trauma:



My mom had me before she was married but when she did get married, the man she married was an alcoholic and very abusive. He was wonderful when he wasn't drinking and we had a great deal of "things" but as soon as the alcohol got in him, he became a different person. I won't even go into detail about how bad it was, but I can assure you that it was awful. My brother and I had different ways of dealing with the trauma we experienced. I internalized that there had to be something wrong with me because first of all, my biological father abandoned me, then this man was so physically, mentally, and emotionally abusive, so I was the common factor.

As a result of the abuse and the trauma, I became a conformist; I wanted to be the best at everything, I wanted to bring home the best grades, I wanted to do everything necessary to prove my worth. My brother, on the other hand, became very rebellious and got involved in disruptive things including substance abuse; it was just a difficult time.

When I was 50, I defended my dissertation and as soon as I defended, my mom said, "I'm going to finally tell my story" and she asked me, "Are you okay with that?" My response was, "Oh, yes, I'm fine." Well, the day that she shared her story, I was there to support her but that was also the day that all of that trauma flooded me, and I went from being a 50-year-old woman to a five-year-old little girl again. Sadly, it took 50 plus years for me to get to where I could deal with my trauma and now I can talk about it. I share my story, which I call from Trauma to Triumph, with a lot of students and a lot of individuals. I share this story as a story of hope for we are all broken people but there are resources available to help us.

Like many children who experience something traumatic, this woman internalized it and thought that there was something wrong with her. On the other hand, her brother acted out. By informing educators about the impact of childhood trauma, how to recognize the symptoms in students and their families, and how to support these children and build their resiliency, we can work to put an end to intergenerational trauma.

In response to David's story, a man from the Blackfeet and Spokane tribes shared,

I can relate to this story as I grew up in foster care from about 12 years old 'til I was emancipated, until I was 18. It was with a non-Native family in Michigan. I don't know, just the frustration, just dealing with not knowing how to express myself emotionally at that time during my adolescence about what was going on in my life.

Another described how similar David's story was to a situation with one of his students,

And he just teared up and then he started to cry, and he said, "Just had an awful night. My dad beat my mom." And he just said, "And he's leaving us. And I'm just mad with the world." And sometimes it's easy to just go ahead and put the pen to the paper and do a referral on the child and send them to the office. But having a little bit of compassion and having a little bit of communication and building that trust with that student really can impact how they respond to you. And even today when I see that young man, he still just is so warm and kind to me and gives me hugs and remembers that day. And I think sometimes that we get so caught up in the testing and the scores and the curriculum and all of those things that we forget the most important best practice and that is building a relationship with the student.

Another described the problem of disciplining kids for being “defiant” when they are actually exhibiting symptoms of trauma. “It creates a cycle that’s hard to get out of. And then very young students have a discipline record instead of an opportunity to grow.” Others explained that many of their kids are diagnosed with disabilities and extreme emotional disorders.

Another participant from the Kiowa tribe in Central Oklahoma described her experience growing up in a community with 70% to 90% Native students in a school district with 37 different tribes:

...even being in a high Native school, just those school experiences of not having that representation at the front of the classroom or the front of the building, and those discrepancies there were significant. But just even personally, I inherited that generational trauma of my grandmother going to boarding school and listening to her stories and her experiences that she had. That always weighed upon me.

The school unit involves students making models of Spanish missions, which often included a boarding school for Native students who were removed from their homes. The California missions were sites of trauma for California Indians and have since been compared to concentration camps.

It was traumatic for the Indian students to relive those projects and actually have to build missions, which were actually locations of trauma.

Teachers’ unions and local districts later circulated a letter discouraging California schools from “mission projects.”

Participants discussed how else to respond to David:

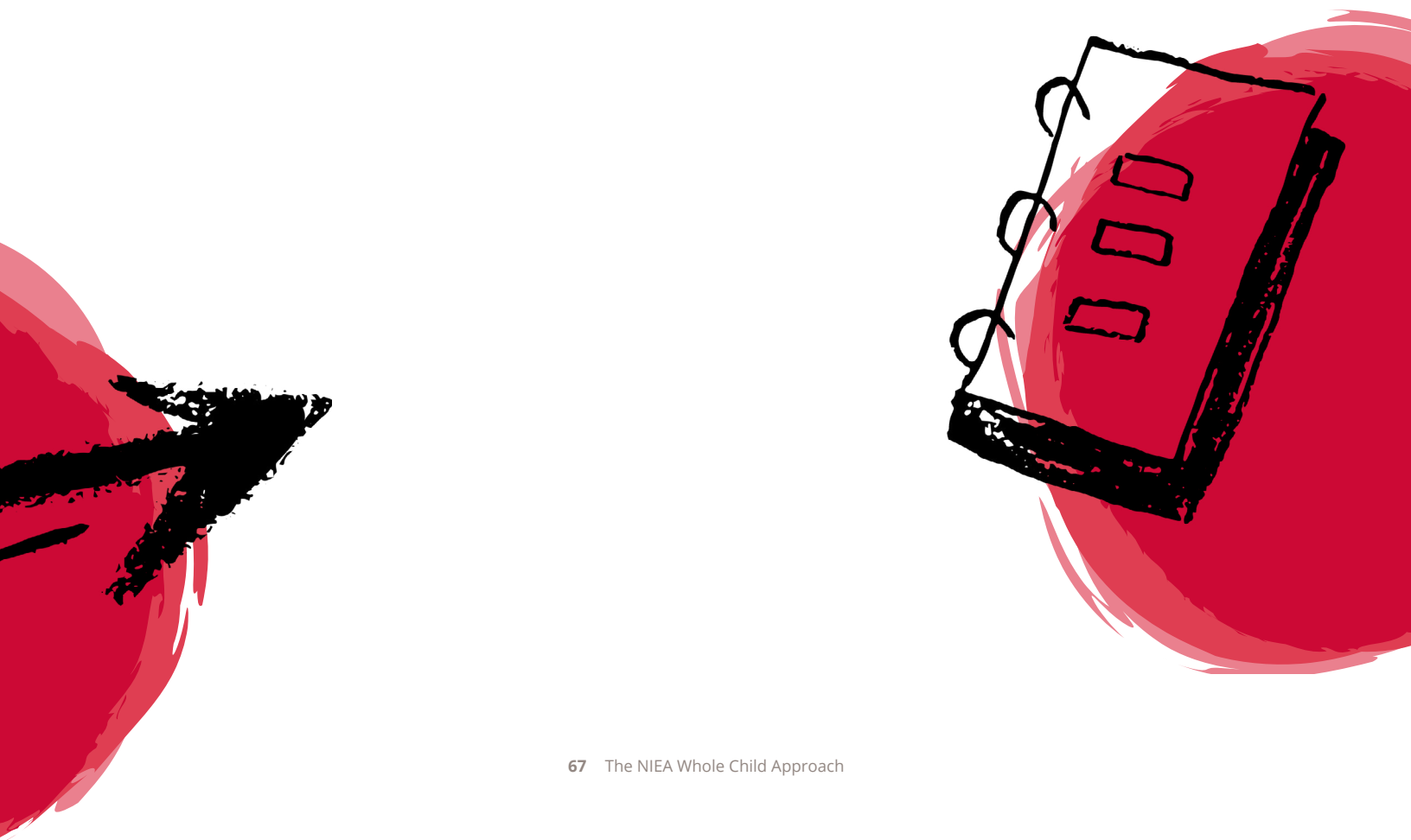
- Stop, and ask why... give the student an opportunity to say, “I had a rough night” or share about what is happening in their home life before administering discipline.
- A little bit of compassionate communication helps the student and builds trust. The mindset of “not my student” or “what happens at home stays at home” must go extinct.
- Saying: “What’s going on? This is not like you.”
- Building a system where a student can non-verbally communicate to an educator that they are not ok facilitates a classroom environment founded on mutual respect and trust.
- Mentors from the community to support student, assist making connections, and practice building trust with adults
- Having someone designated for assessing incoming students and ensuring a safe place for them to go. Still, oftentimes it is forbidden for children to reveal private information about their home lives.

As one participant recounts, “Not only did I live with my brother who had alcoholism, depression, some mental things that were going on and an addict, but also a lot of my male cousins and...those were imprinted from an early age throughout my adulthood...”

What I bring in, particularly in the school spaces, or what I bring into places as a young Native man was really this propensity to violence, and having a lot of violence around me, whether it be because of alcohol or drugs or other issues, not only violence, and having a lot of violence around me, whether it be because of alcohol or drugs or other issues, not only domestic violence, but just the general inclination to violence. Those were imprinted from an early age throughout my adulthood,

A Yankton Sioux anthropologist and educator with the Nebraska Department of Education and an American Indian Liaison in the commissioner’s office with Wičanpi Research and Consulting explained how tribes in her area are impacted by long standing trauma to be understood in March 2023:

And here in Nebraska we have four tribes headquartered here and several on the border of Nebraska. So, we have quite a few different tribes here like you do in some other areas. But one thing is constant among all of them and that is suicide, homicide, and substance abuse. Our kids are statistics, but our kids are like 10 times more likely than other kids to get disciplinary actions. Of course, we’ve talked a lot about the fact that so many of our kids are diagnosed with disabilities and with extreme emotional disorders. So here we are looking at our kids, and we don’t want to seem as if we’re letting them get away with things. We should learn how to treat all kids the same because I don’t care what background you have, there’s this potential for trauma to be present in the day.



Trauma: Foster Care, Disconnection, and Cultural Erasure

Many Native youth end up in the foster care system, which can be traumatic in and of itself, especially if the foster parent is not Native. While a child might have a present and loving foster parent, if that foster parent is non-Native, the child is likely to feel disconnected from their cultural identity. In a culture that values community, family tradition, spirituality, and a connection to nature, Native Americans who grow up without a Native parent may experience a profound sense of loss as they struggle to fit in but feel adrift from both Native and White communities.

In a culture that values community, family tradition, spirituality, and a connection to nature, Native Americans who grow up without a Native parent may experience a profound sense of loss as they struggle to fit in but feel adrift from both Native and White communities.

One participant reflected on their experience in foster care:

I guess my trauma I would like to share is that I can relate to this story as I grew up in foster care from about 12 years old till I was emancipated, until I was 18. It was with a non-Native family in Michigan. I don't know, just the frustration, just dealing with not knowing how to express myself emotionally at that time during my adolescence about what was going on in my life

The Long Lasting Impact of Forced Family Dissolution

The removal of children from their families is considered one of the most devastating traumas that occurred to Native peoples because it resulted in children losing their language, culture, customs, and spiritual beliefs, as well as sense of belonging to a family, community, and nation (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Menzies, 2008; Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010). Native children tend to enter the foster care system at an earlier age, are more likely to experience neglect, and/or caregiver incapacity (Children and Youth Service Review, 2023), and are likely to be placed in non-Native families (NICWA, 2019).

Native youth in foster care are at greater risk for mental health challenges, such as substance abuse, suicide, and depression (Jones et al., 2023) due to adverse childhood experiences, intergenerational historical trauma, on-going cultural disconnection in education system, and loss of identity resulting from placement with non-Native families (Blackstock, 2016; Stefanescu & Hilliker, 2023). About 18% of Native adolescents residing outside the tribe struggle with depressive symptoms, and they are significantly more likely to have mental health problems with severe impairments compared to Native youths in the tribe (Park-Lee et al., 2018).

One participant reflected on the cultural disconnection that boarding schools and adoption of Native children by non-Native parents can have:

Some of our students have non-Native parents, and some of their parents were adopted, and were not raised in tribal communities, or really know much about their tribal connections at all. We have to have support helping them feel like they're connected and supported in that way as well.



A participant from Washington State reflected on how children were taken from Native families in the 1960s.

Here in Washington State, they had something called the 1960s sweep. I don't know if you heard about that in Washington State where the hospitals would just take the babies and tell the moms that the baby was deformed, or the baby had died. They'd take the baby away, and it would be adopted clear across the United States. I have three cousins that happened to. All of this, it impacts families. It's torn people apart, families apart, and it leaves to the grandkids and now the great grandkids, just like, what do we do? Are we bad for wanting to know where we come from? Are we bad for staying? Are we bad for leaving?

It's just like it's a huge issue here, and alongside that is the foster care system. The same thing, the same thing, because there's just so much. Then, you add in the casino monies with the tribes that have the casino monies, and wherever that child goes, the money goes with it. It's just like people actually don't want the child. They just want the money, and it's just like, "Oh God." My dream is to have a 12 bedroom house with four beds in it so I can take care of all these kids. That's my issue here in Washington State.

Another participant points to the importance of changing the system so that it meets the needs of Native people by integrating people back into their language and culture because colonization has severely impacted their self-esteem and connection to their roots.

So, I think there's some healing that needs to be done, and there needs to be some acknowledgement of that, because many of our urban relatives are carrying that weight of not being connected to ancestral lands. And also, we sort of are putting the blame on them for not knowing their language and culture.



Trauma: Importance of Inclusive and Representative Curricula

While a Native child might not personally have been abused or witnessed a traumatic event, they still hold within them the generational trauma of their destruction and eradication of their culture. The Western education system in the United States includes competencies that do not highlight the unique skills and strengths of Native youth who often have a profound understanding of nature in its many forms, a deep regard for all forms of life, and cultural skills and traditions, including art and music, that have been handed down from generation to generation. Moreover, Native peoples have stewardship with their lands, language, and culture that is not recognized by Western educational systems. By teaching and evaluating students on standards that do not line up with their experiences, schools are sending the message that the Native experience and culture are not important nor valued.

If a child does not see themselves reflected in their school's curriculum, they may find it hard to relate to the material, or worse: they may start to internalize the belief that their experiences do not matter.

An educator from Spokane Public Schools in Spokane, Washington, reflects on the ways in which he's observed Native youth feel a disconnect between what is taught in school and what they value in their culture/family,

...because of the standards or the policies that are set in place that our teachers are supposed to still uphold, it still has that effect and that influence over the way that we're teaching our youth in colonized ways. And if you look at the idea of the cultural brain and how the use of language and culture influences our thoughts and our behaviors, that has a huge effect on the values that our youth are growing up with and the ways that they're holding.

Even when he and his colleagues tried implementing a curriculum that explicitly taught Native language to children, he found that it was unsustainable due to the Western education system.

Within the school system, our kids don't fit...Our kids are facing PTSD every single day when they're going into these spaces at school and they're being told that they're not of value and they're not of worth, and that the world either views them as just a resource or as an impediment to white supremacy becoming too full fruition. So, our youth can't even be in those spaces and feel safe with who they are. So even if we were to offer our language programs there, it would still be affected by colonialism. It'd be affected by the colonial practices that we are being subjected to.

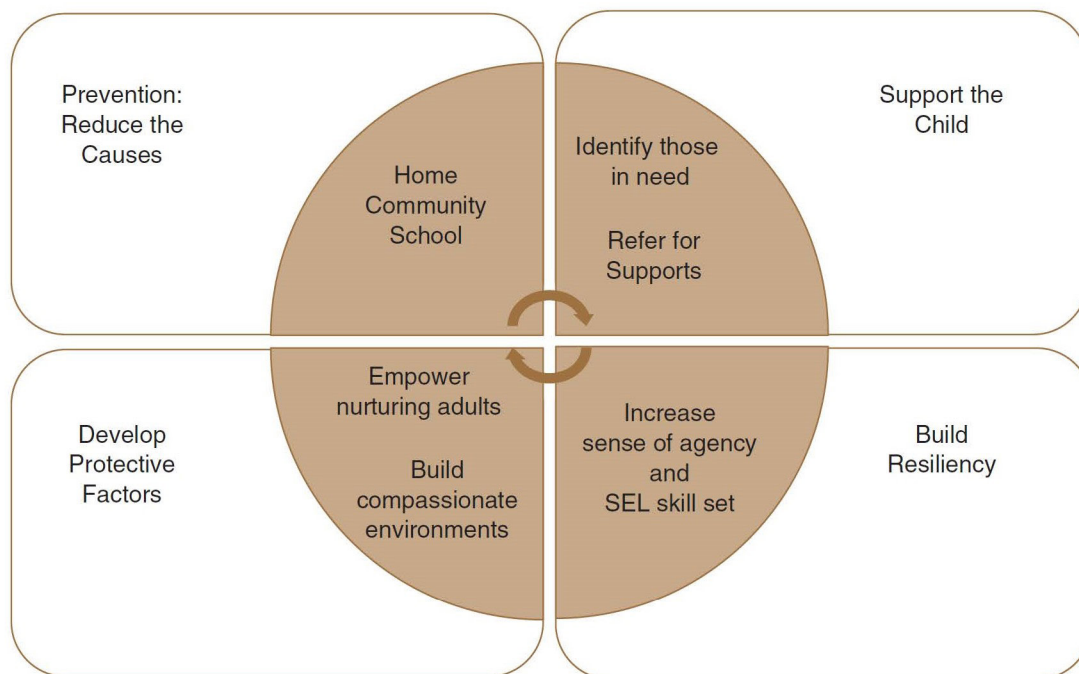


Compassionate Healing Practices

As participants discussed some of the trauma they and their families, students, and communities have experienced, they were then asked to consider compassionate solutions and how prevention, designing wraparound supports, building resiliency, and developing protective factors might contribute to a greater sense of well-being for students.

A Framework for Cultivating Well-Being in Schools

FIGURE 0.1 Compassionate School Mental Health Model



From Mason, C., Wenzel, M., Asby, D., & Staeheli, M. (2020). A compassionate school response to children's mental illness: A Childhood-Trauma Learning Collaborative resource guide. New England Mental Health Technology Transfer Center. Used with permission from the New England MHTTC.



Schools as Agents for Healing Trauma

To establish schools as agents for healing is an intentional process. It is very easy to advocate for, but can be difficult to engage intentionally. To create empathetic schools that focus on holistic wellness, there needs to be an intentional and concerted effort to build capacity and foundational knowledge. It takes a shift in school culture and climate, with specific training and understanding needs.

Integrating Native and Compassionate Practices

Research has shown that compassionate support can help offset the risks associated with generational trauma. In light of this, how do Native schools provide compassionate support? How can we strengthen and honor this support?

Prevention. While the statistics and personal accounts of Native people's exposure to trauma are staggering, there are many strategies and interventions that can lessen the lifelong impact of that trauma. Just as traumatic events can negatively impact children in childhood, early intervention and protective factors can increase resilience and stop the recurrence of generational trauma. When children's environments, including their education system, respond to their individual and cultural needs, they have a greater possibility of developing resilience.

Schools are uniquely positioned to support the healing of children who have experienced traumatic experiences, and it starts with building relationships with students and validating their individual and cultural experiences. As a retired teacher in Oklahoma said,

I came to this trauma one because I just had two of my former students involved in a shooting toward each other. And so, I'm sitting in a lot of trauma right now and we really need to, I really want to push our traditional ways into helping us to heal. And I so appreciate NIEA helping us to do this.

By informing educators about the impact of childhood trauma, how to recognize the symptoms in students and their families, and how to support these children and build their resiliency, we can begin to break the cycle of trauma.

Professional Development as Prevention

One participant described a successful approach to building comprehensive expertise in recognizing trauma among all staff who interact with students, rather than just teachers:

Attempting to have the whole staff trained in trauma and how the brain is with trauma... I think having teachers, all the teachers learn this, all the staff. Bus drivers, cafeteria workers, everybody learns about trauma and the brain. We found that to be really helpful.

Integrating Native Culture into the Classroom

Integrating and teaching Native culture and language into local curricula is another powerful way to preserve and promote Native culture and have Native children see themselves reflected in schools. Several participants described how they are spotlighting Native stories within the educational curriculum, providing targeted interventions central to the mental illness and substance abuse issues that adversely affect Native populations, and leaning on the community to provide positive role models to Native youth.

Harnessing Community Supports

Community based education is a hallmark of building educational sovereignty. The community, families, and tribes should be a part engaging, developing, and sustaining a community-based approach. This leads to initiatives that are connected and emerge to meet the needs of each distinct tribal community.

Advocacy from the school's community and Native students' community serves as a protective factor because the union between school and community can strive for goals in their students' best interests. Facilitating communication between home and school is a protective factor because the student may connect to more supportive adults and gain access to resources or circles that affirm their identities, especially after being adopted into a non-Native family.

A school superintendent at the Menominee Indian Reservation, described a variety of positive strategies they've implemented,

We're a public school district, and we have about 95% of our kids, of a thousand, are Native. And we've been doing a kind of a community school response to trauma for about five years. So, we have a community and a school component. So, we've been doing kind of a whole child approach here in our school systems for about five years.

Wraparound Supports

Culture-based wraparound supports can help Native American communities by providing a comprehensive support system to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of children and youth. This system can include aid such as academic tutoring for youth, mental health counseling, cultural enrichment activities, and family support services. In schools, this holistic "whole child" approach is especially helpful, as it can help students achieve academic success while also strengthening their cultural identity and community ties.

Counseling is often a key component of effective wrap-around services. Individual or group therapy sessions can help Indigenous community members by providing them with a safe and supportive environment where they can safely explore their cultural identity and heritage. It can also help Native youth develop a sense of pride in their culture and build a strong connection to their community. Oftentimes, culture-based counselors will employ a person-centered approach and give clients tools to overcome their own problems (MHTTC, 2022). Culture-based counselors also tend to incorporate relevant cultural practices into therapy sessions, which can include storytelling, music, and even spiritual work.

In the words of Hunkpapa Lakota Jon Eagle:

What mainstream society is calling the wraparound process is nothing new to Indian country. In fact, people have been doing this for centuries. The wraparound process tries to find a balance between the natural supports and professional services in your community to implement strength-based individual plans of care to meet the needs of the children and families you are serving...

Connecting Circles of Care (CCOC), a system of care grantee supported by SAMHSA, outlines how to effectively incorporate cultural components into Indigenous communities (Palmer et al., 2011). According to the CCOC guidelines, wraparound supports should be

- a. rooted in culture
- b. created by people who share the cultures
- c. delivered by professionals who are culturally appropriate

When these standards are met, wraparound services can help promote learning, good health, and better community relationships.

For example, an Indigenous therapist could relay “The Tale of Two Wolves” or “The Eagle and the Condor” during a counseling session and ask clients to compare the story themes to themes in their own lives (Native Languages of the Americas, 2020). “The Tale of Two Wolves” teaches about the importance of self-help through positive thoughts and behaviors, while “The Eagle and the Condor” emphasizes the importance of respect, cooperation, and restoration. Lessons like these can empower clients and help them find holistic healing and balance.

Another participant commented:

We have been providing an integrated supports /wraparound services model in all the public schools. I've sat through today's session on the supports, the wraparound services, and the supports aspect of the whole child's model, and really looking at how we can bring to bear in school's coordination of existing services in the community. Working in partnership with tribal government partners and other community resources to provide services that students and families need to really help them deal with the trauma and the day-to-day situations they face that really prevent students from realizing their potential and taking hold of the vision for their future and for their future generations that they have within them.

Comprehensive School Mental Health and Restorative Practices

An enrolled member of the Confederate Tribes of Grande Ronde provided background information on national efforts to support the mental health of Alaska Indian and Alaska Native students. These efforts are based on helping with identity development, helping youth regain a sense of culture, and promoting the sovereignty of Native people. The Mental Health Technology Transfer Center offers no-cost technical assistance, including the development and distribution of culturally informed K-12 mental health products. One of these is Classroom WISE: a Three-Part Training Package on Mental Health Literacy for Teachers and School Staff. He described the school mental health program for the National American, Indian, Alaska Native Mental Health Technology Transfer Center which is a part of a nationwide mental health network funded by SAMHSA that delivers technical assistance and services to schools, governments, and other organizations serving the mental health needs of students. The center services the unique and specific needs of American, Indian, Alaska, and Native populations and is free to use.

The Center also delivers technical assistance and services designed individually for each community, school, tribal government, or a municipality. There is a free three-part training series (Classroom Wise) aimed at increasing the mental health Literacy of Educators, school personnel and tribes. The participant referenced the significant evidence between increased trauma, exposure and negative mental health outcomes for Native youth. Native youth are 2 times 2.5 times more likely to experience this in their lifetime—this is only compounded when considering historical generation trauma. He concludes that there is a need to develop specific and culturally informed systems of dealing with mental health for Native children.

Integrating Social and Emotional Learning

A chief program officer for Native students, reflects on how a change in perspective can support the social-emotional well-being of the student who is struggling:

There's still, in too many places, a bias toward viewing toward a defiance lens. If a student hasn't done their homework, they've made a choice to be defiant... an understanding of how much more effective it could be for the student and for the teacher to come from a position of understanding and helping teachers be equipped to have the confidence and the feelings of confidence, to approach it less from that bias of opposition and defiance and more towards a position of understanding and appreciation and respect for what the students are experiencing and bringing to the school each day.

Schools that serve Native populations should have dedicated school mental health staff and clear school protocol for response to intervention. Explicitly teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) skills in the school setting can help students with their emotional intelligence and ability to ask for help when needed. Some schools have found success with techniques such as art therapy, pull-out groups, individual counseling, SEL lessons in the classroom, and professional development for teachers around how to support Native youth with the issues that many of them are grappling with.

Some of that professional development should focus on non-punitive, trauma-sensitive responses to student behavior.

Restorative Practices. The school superintendent at the Menominee Indian Reservation, also reflected on accountability versus discipline and the use of “reflection rooms” to move away from the traditional Western practice of suspending students.

I don't like the word 'discipline', I like 'accountability'. And what we found was restorative practices is a very effective way to help kids, because kids get to process their emotions and you move the accountability piece to the end after kids process emotions... So, we've had success around restorative practices, and then again just trying to use a trauma responsive approach in the schools. Of course, in each of our schools we have kind of reflection rooms.

He has found that reflection rooms are comforting and help kids process their emotions and by changing the school system to incorporate these new procedures, we help kids heal. “I really think what Covid did is it opened up the Western world that a lot of non-Native kids are struggling with their mental health.”

Mindfulness-based Interventions

Research points to a number of potential solutions to address the stress, trauma, and mental health concerns of children and adults. One approach is mindfulness-based interventions, which in Native contexts has included on talking circles, prayer, smudging (burning of one or more medicines gathered from earth which symbolizes appreciation and gratitude towards the creator/Mother Nature, and others in the community), storytelling, an emphasis on spirituality, the sanctity of stories, and the importance of Native Knowledge (Beshai et al., 2023; Four Arrows et al., 2010; Hoffman, 2010; Schiff & Moore, 2006).



Native Mindfulness and Yoga Practices

Participants mentioned the need for an Indigenized approach to mindfulness. Mindfulness in a Native context is interlinked with world views that are strongly underpinned by spiritual elements, cultural well-being traditions, and a deep awareness of one's connections to the land, nature, family, and ancestors. Mindfulness Based Instruction that has incorporated Native mindfulness traditions has resulted in improvements in stress management, immune function, positive affect and self-awareness, greater focus, and decreased suicidal thoughts (Le & Gobert, 2015; Le & Shim, 2014).

Additionally, culturally adapted, trauma-informed yoga programs for Native adolescent girls have shown promising results in establishing a safe haven for girls to reconnect with their cultural roots and address the trauma they experienced while in the child welfare system. These could be an effective approach to promoting recovery and uplifting Native communities.

To encourage mindfulness and foster a secure environment, these sanctuaries should integrate customary practices such as creative crafts (such as beading) and create a sense of community through dialogue and the sharing of wisdom incorporated with yoga (Barudin, 2021).

Trauma: Protective Factors

Cultivating Community and Relationships with Students. Having relationships with adults, even a single adult, helps to protect children and youth against the adverse effects of trauma. Parents, community members, educators, and school staff can all build meaningful relationships with students.

By understanding what students are experiencing and helping to move from a position of judgment and bias to one of support, teachers can increase their abilities to help build student confidence and feelings of self-worth. Many of the methods here are rooted in relationship building, but they are directly linked to teacher pedagogy, educator identity, and cultural competence, humility, literacy, and responsiveness—which all lead to cultural relevance.

A listening session participant shared that in their reservation school,

The teachers have relationships with the kids and the families, at least the ones that have been in the community and have a particular framework for working within that school. They already know what the family dynamics are, and there generally are practices that have been put in place.

And I think one of the biggest factors sometimes is the lack of communication and the lack of relationship building. I think sometimes that a lot of things could have been eliminated if you just take time to talk with a student.

Communicating effectively is key and it takes some effort and intentionality. Good communication skills can be encouraged by educators who understand the importance of relationships and building a sense of community. One retired educator commented:

I think sometimes that we get so caught up in the testing and the scores and the curriculum and all of those things that we forget the most important best practice and that is building a relationship with the student.

Another participant, a retired educator, described techniques that had worked for her:

I remember when I taught middle school, it was important for me to know my students. The first year I taught, I didn't do any of the things that I eventually evolved into. I found that getting to know your students and giving them a voice to help them express how they feel, especially first thing in the morning, I had to ask.

I had to evolve and develop a plan with them. I taught in a very high needs school environment. They suggested that we keep hats outside the door, and when they first come in, as I greeted them, when they're coming in, they're wearing the hat depending on their mood. Then, eventually when I saw the hat, that was really, really bad. Eventually, when I got the class started, I would circle back to the kid that had a really bad mood hat and I would figure out what's going on.

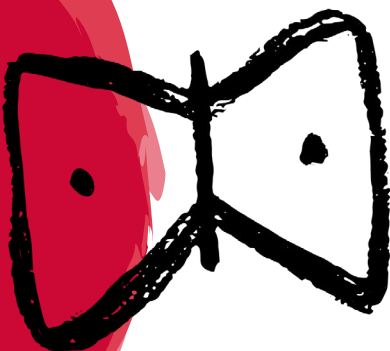
Taking the time to slow down, get to know students, and understand their lives and where they are coming from is so beneficial. Showing students you care and want to hear about their experiences can truly be life changing for them. Building strong relationships with parents, community members, and peers can help build a strong, supportive, and compassionate community and serve as another protective factor against early adversity for Native youth.

A retired teacher explained the use of a calming corner and also rituals for how she began her class:

I used to have some strategies that I learned to use was to have a calm down corner and explained it to all of my students so they knew as soon as they walked in my room, or our room, they knew that if they were going through stuff they could just kind of let me know however, and they could go right to that spot and they could either choose to write, draw, or do whatever, different strategy to help them calm down and refocus. Another thing is that as a classroom teacher, students knew that when they came in, they just had to let me know and then they had permission right away without any... They just had to make eye contact and they could go to that corner and start writing.

I had one student, and her mom was in jail and her grandma was always kind of giving her a hard time. So, when she would come in, she just grabbed one of those binder notebooks and she just wrote every time she came in pretty much. And so, there's things that we need to let our educators know so that they can set up their classroom in ways that students, when they come in, know they have that opportunity. Like, "Okay, I'm going to be at Ms. so-and-so or Mr. so-and-so or Mx. so-and-so's class and I know that I'm going to have the opportunity to go and just chill and pull myself together.

Another thing is those routines. It's so important to have routines in your classroom so that students, when they walk in, know exactly what's going to happen and things of that nature. So that's some of the things I wanted to talk about. That calm down corner was really, really appreciated by a lot of my students.





Building Resiliency

Although the immediacy and unresolved nature of cultural traumas in students' lives can challenge their ability to engage with the content and goals of the dominant culture's universal curricula, compassionate support for trauma is essential to reclaiming Native sovereignty and projecting a hopeful and authentically guided path forward.

A first step in creating the capacity for educational success is building a sense of resiliency, safety, and self-respect that is rooted in recognition of the values of students' own communities. Reclaiming the cultural heritage that was disrupted by colonization must be a process that involves students as co-creators. When students gain a sense of stability, safety, or peace, they may begin to open their thoughts and hearts to connect the spirit of the past to their own present and negotiate its relevance and value in new ways.

Resiliency for Native people is inherent. Native people are already resilient because they are survivors. They are the answers to their ancestors' prayers. Spirituality is a huge part of this; however, resiliency can become part of the educational culture of a given community. This includes the resiliency to overcome adversity—know that adversity exists, and despite adversity, persevering in our failures and successes.

Make the connection to resiliency. Administrators ought to pay more attention to the long-standing Native wisdom when creating frameworks on health and healing. If we could incorporate these, not only would it facilitate communication between the Native land and the school, but it would create an opportunity for spiritual, physical, and emotional healing for Native students. However, to achieve and implement any tribal knowledge or practices, it is paramount to first consult the tribe. As Whole Child Prevention Specialist Raquel Ramos indicated, "just because something says evidence-based and it has a medicine wheel on, does not make it Native."

Reclaiming the cultural heritage that was disrupted by colonization must be a process that involves students as co-creators. When students gain a sense of stability, safety, or peace, they may begin to open their thoughts and hearts to connect the spirit of the past to their own present and negotiate its relevance and value in new ways.

Celebrating Students' Strengths

Acknowledging, reinforcing, and celebrating students' inherent strengths is a way to build resiliency. Relatedly, identity and having a strong tie to one's cultural background can be protective factors as well. Feeling connected with a cultural group can enhance one's sense of self and self-esteem and having strong ties to one's cultural identity may strengthen social support networks within families or communities of shared cultural background. Interventions with American Indian youth have found that incorporating cultural identity and cultural values have yielded improved outcomes (Morris et al., 2021).

One participant remarked,

Spiritual connection – next generation healing from present traditional worldview to inform our mental health, our physical health, emotional, so on and so forth is critical. I think that cultural healing is needed. I've heard terms used, like cultural abuse or lateral oppression, or just not giving people a sense of belonging because they don't really understand that maybe some folks don't have that connection. It's been broken. We need to have a compassionate school culture to understand that.

Another participant discussed the work they do within their organization to help kids understand their place within the larger frame of their work and the importance of reclaiming their indigeneity,

As a Native person, we are stewards. We are stewards of this land, we are stewards for each other, and we need to make sure that everything that we're doing and we're practicing is aligned with that, that we are one within our own families. We are still just one within our own community. We're still just one within the world and everything around us. We're still one, and we need to take care of that and hold that sacred.

Another participant shared,

Providing trauma-informed care and social emotional learning is an important step in creating resilient children, however, including a culturally responsive curriculum with the inclusion of Native language learning is just as important.

Confidence

It's also important to build students' confidence and critical thinking. Encouraging them to question the world around them and form their own opinions will help them greatly. An education director from the Reno-Sparks colony, a tribe in Nevada shared:

My pedagogy, though, is to raise our students to be just as comfortable to question authority as they would be to question their peers., I'm trying to create social-emotional lessons that revolve around teaching our students the equipment necessary to challenge their adults in their lives.

Strengths

Focusing on strengths instead of deficits and promoting strong ties to one's culture, community, and background can help students develop a strong sense of self and boost their self-esteem and overall resilience. Strengths can be examined in a reciprocal way, especially when relationship-building. It is not only student centric, but educators, families, communities, and other stakeholders need to be aware of each other's strengths and use those strengths to enhance student learning and well-being.

Focusing on strengths instead of deficits and promoting strong ties to one's culture, community, and background can help students develop a strong sense of self and boost their self-esteem and overall resilience.

To build resiliency, one educator explained how they are working to become more aware of student strengths,

We look at everything as wellness versus mental health or physical health just because those terms have somewhat negative connotations. So, we're trying to really flip things around and be strength-based in our language so that way we can be strength-based in our thinking and move towards the real healing of who we are as Native people.

Strengths that can be leveraged include:

- Diversity among Native Americans, such as their culture, language, and the ways that they honor culture
- Younger generations' renewed interest and emphasis on learning and knowing their Native language
- Tribes are building capacity at the community and tribal level
- More collaboration with schools
- Sharing of knowledge ways (epistemology)
- Creating and infusing culture into schools
- Creating more holistic and school-wide programs
- Connecting students with culture and language
- Valuing identity by learning about one another
- Advocacy of tribal leaders in matters pertaining to public schools
- Finding practical ways/means to tell Native stories without romanticizing



Unique strengths and needs of individual tribes



FINDING #5

Finding #5: The unique strengths and needs of individual tribes must be central to the education of Native youth. Native people want to have a significant say in what is implemented in their communities, rather than generalized approaches that minimize tribal-specific brilliance and alienate youth.

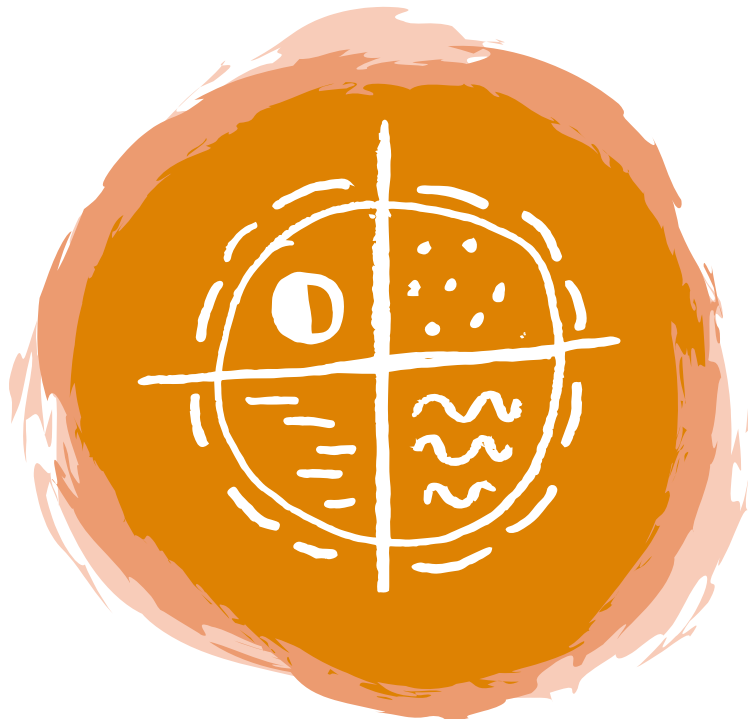
Participants repeatedly stressed the value of highlighting and reclaiming the strengths, wisdom, and unity of the Tribe as a foundation of young people’s sense of self-worth and empowerment. We must be careful of using a one-size-fits-all mindset and move towards constantly adapted “best practices” for each tribal community. Every tribal community is unique, and their needs are different. We must prioritize guiding principles and appropriate practices, ensuring that we are listening to the needs of each individual community. They each must have a voice in deciding on policies and recommendations for improving the lives of Native students.

In this section we discuss:

- Culturally relevant pedagogy and Native Education for All (NEFA)
- State involvement in Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Dissatisfaction with state policies and working with state governments

Culturally relevant Social Emotional Learning programs have achieved early successes in closing the achievement gap between Native students and their White and Asian peers. When a student feels that their experiences matter and that their ways of being and knowing are valued at school, academic spaces can begin to feel more comfortable. Instead of claiming a school is inclusive, policies that make real, effective change occur and we put the students’ well-being first.

Still, state governments often pose roadblocks to implementing culturally relevant pedagogy through inaction, the politicization of education, misappropriation of funds, and use of outside experts instead of ones within the community.



Tribal communities can be a significant source of support for students. Participants were concerned about students who are not connected to their tribal communities. They also recognized that in some areas with a large number of tribes this may take considerable effort. Students need significant opportunities to explore and learn about their heritage and culture through well designed lessons and curricular adaptations. As one participant stated,

So many of our students don't have those opportunities to go back to their tribal communities. So, we have to create it from our end and make those partnerships and those collaboration efforts with the tribes. We tried that with our tribes and our students. But we have over 52 different tribes. I will say that with the majority of the larger tribes such as Cherokee Nation, Choctaw, Chickasaws, we are just trying to make and collaborate and have those meaningful conversations with those tribes so that they know that their students, their tribal citizens are here in the metro urban schools as well.

Social and Emotional Learning – the Support of States

Participants reported a need for Social and Emotional Learning in schools and the lack of consensus from the state government. Despite the critical role of the state government in supporting vulnerable populations like Native communities, there are ongoing issues with implementation and policies that fail to meet the needs and wants of the education system for these communities. As a result, those who are most susceptible to discrimination and trauma continue to face significant obstacles and are not receiving the support they require. Although there are challenges in providing support for vulnerable populations, there are individuals who remain committed to filling the gaps and advocating for change. To make progress, it's important to continue working together, speak up about our needs, and practice patience. Support from other groups will be needed to help with the needed changes in policy.

A participant described recent impediments to using SEL in schools,

There is a newly elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction who has spoken out against the inclusion of SEL in public schools. I just want to say to you, this is so ridiculous, and it's happening across the United States in various school districts. I don't know what the resolution is, other than for many of us to say SEL is a part of learning. The people I talk to, some of the experts in the area of trauma, say all learning is social. We must consider the social components of learning, that's the way learning happens, and if students need support, we really need to support that. Your voice is important.

Another participant responded by describing the situation in Montana,

I would say that's an issue we have here in Montana as well. This is a conversation topic at my house a lot because our State Superintendent is an elected position in our state, and it does make it really difficult when we're trying to navigate through the politicization of education right now. We have to very carefully navigate how we bring up issues such as social-emotional learning, equity, or all those taboo words right now. We have to really, really tiptoe around them, and it makes it really difficult when we're working with already marginalized populations, because it is very counterproductive, I feel, to my work.



Another participant in Oklahoma confirmed similar concerns in that state.

Here in Oklahoma, we are in the same boat as well. We have a lot of policies that passed that do not help us at all.

Building on that, another participant commented on how they are speaking out about the moral and ethical issues when working with state governments, even as they are disappointed in the lack of responsiveness.

Shifting the conversation, another participant highlighted the significant issue of the misappropriation of funds. Throughout the three sessions, funding continuously reemerged as a barrier as a barrier that many Tribal schools and governments face this issue:

Hi, I'm from Central Oregon, from Warm Springs, Oregon. And a lot of our issues are with implementation and also with administration. A lot of advocacy going on the community level and a lot of misappropriation of funds, a lot of tokenization. So overall, we never get anywhere. You have the facade that we are culturally inclusive. We promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, but then when it comes to actually hearing authentic voices, it gets shut down at the administrative level. So, a lot of times it never gets to the staff level.

And we do have teachers here that are really invested in our community. We live on a reservation, but it's a state-funded school and our reservation paid for half of it. So, you have literally our community as a stakeholder in this school. But our voices are very limited. And when they hire advisors, when they have their EDI training, they will pick someone from California or from Washington or Idaho. And it's like they don't trust that we're the experts of our own community. And it's just complete, we're hitting walls no matter what.

When we address things like misappropriation of funds, and we address... There is even a senate bill passed here in Oregon, Senate Bill SB 13 about shared history. And they're supposed to develop a curriculum for K to 12 to have a tribally led history in schools across Oregon. But that's not being implemented either, and it gets our kids disengaged.

Also in that legislation, include funding in there too, because I know for some states, they might have it in there that indigenous studies is mandated in the school system, but it's up to the indigenous community to fund that portion of the curriculum. And I think that funding needs to be included in any of that policy that's created for that.

Another Southwestern resident explained the need for changes in state legislation:

... we have some pretty good state legislation that prioritizes Indian education. The problem is it doesn't have a whole lot of specificity. I put in the bigger chat a policy that Central Consolidated recently adopted to actually be more specific. And so I think what I've been noticing over the last few years is it's great that [my State] and other states are starting to talk more about this, but it's always in these broad general terms, and the how isn't included? How are we going to do these things? How are we going to implement them? What's our timeline for implementing them? I mean, we are putting tons of pressure on our public education department, for example, in [my home State], but that's what I'm seeing... the idea is starting to gain momentum, but the details are still lacking.



Without sufficient funding and collaboration from Indigenous community members, any policies or mandates with seemingly positive intentions may not have the intended outcome. For example, if the Tribal community must fund school curricula centered on Tribal history, government, or language, but the Tribe does not get to create the curricula, the movement may be counterproductive as the curriculum may not reflect or value Tribal histories or epistemologies. Furthermore, if the Tribe is experiencing, for example, a high dropout rate of Native students, their financial priorities may be elsewhere. However, this does not mean that states should not include Tribal ways of knowing and histories, but that there needs to be a larger discussion about funding.

Tribal Nations must not be treated identically

Still, the greater underlying theme is that Tribal Nations must not be treated identically. While this may be difficult for states with a multitude of different tribes, discussing the intricate needs of one tribe is necessary because they will not mirror the needs of another. Increasing the number of tribal liaisons and Indigenous representation in state and federal government and Native presence on school boards may create a great deal of opportunities for constructive advocacy and positive change.

Native Education for All. Stephanie Hawk, Citizen of Potawatomi Nation and NIEA Tribal State Policy Associate, described the Native Education for All (NEFA), an educational movement led by Tribal Nations and state partners to provide all K-12 students with instruction on American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian peoples.

NEFA is expressed through state legislation and state board policies that implement, require, or mandate students be taught Native subjects and standards. Native history, culture, and tribal government are subjects that are commonly covered in NEFA legislation and policy:

- Montana, Oregon, and Washington are three states that have passed legislation and are currently implementing NEFA.
- NIEA is actively working with partners in Arizona, North Dakota, and Minnesota to advance NEFA through collaboration with Tribal Nations, state education offices, educators, and Native education advocates to support the passage and implementation of NEFA legislation and policy.

Examples of NEFA

North Dakota: SB 2304 required Native history and social studies curriculum be taught to students as a requirement to graduate from high school. The SB 2304 working group is comprised of former tribal leaders, education and Native education advocates, and the North Dakota Historical Society, who have all partnered with NIEA to ensure implementation of the bill.

Arizona: Newly proposed HB 2513 will incorporate instruction on Native American history into appropriate existing K-12 Curricula. NIEA works with the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. (ITCA), the Arizona Indian Education Association, and the state Office of Indian Education to develop tribally approved content and legislative policy recommendations.

Minnesota: NIEA is working with Tribal Nations Education Committee, Minnesota Indian Education Association, We Are Still Here Minnesota, the State Office of American Indian Education, and the Native educators and advocates to plan for advocacy to pass Native Education for All.

**More resources, better
financing, research,
and policy changes**



FINDING #6

FINDING #6

Finding #6: More resources, better financing, research, and policy changes are needed to fully support the sovereignty and implementation of programs designed to strengthen Native children's education and outcomes.

A system built with the intention to erase Native nations is not one that likes to center Native communities' health and ancient practices. However, like research and the participants conclude, culture is a preventative factor.

It is necessary to decolonize teacher accreditation programs and decolonize data. Data informs curriculum, and when it takes a Native lens, it can more easily be integrated into a classroom and our understanding and implementation of Whole Child frameworks. Yet, attempts to implement Native practices in education have often been met with significant resistance. The participants of NIEA's listening session shared their journeys in this realm - their triumphs and ongoing battles. The session included hopeful descriptions of NIEA's current work with legislation and the future these policies can create.

It is an understatement to say that Native communities disproportionately face adverse physical and mental health impacts. But these outcomes are largely the result of the suppression of Native ways and culture. Instead of just referencing Native communities as statistics of adversity, more resources and financing can support and rewrite these numbers. When policies and programs protect Native children, Indigenous communities are strengthened, school environments grow, and the well-being and success of more children becomes assured.



Some of NIEA's work includes advocating for Native youth in the juvenile system, the Native American Teacher Education Pathway Act, and the Intergenerational Trauma and Culturally Appropriate Services, and supporting the The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy Act. NIEA's work on Capitol Hill is invaluable and their analysts will continue to make positive changes.

For example, a recent victory for all tribes is the Supreme Court decision to uphold ICWA, the Indian Child Welfare Act (June 21, 2023), aimed at keeping Indian children in the foster care system as close to their home Tribe or Indigenous families as possible and addressing the high rate of Native children unjustly removed from their homes and communities (Lakota Times, 2023). While ICWA is upheld, the law will hopefully protect Native children while respecting Tribal sovereignty. In response to the momentous decision, South Dakota Representative Peri Pourier stated,

This is a historic moment for Tribal Nations and ICWA. The Supreme Court's ruling is a resounding recognition of the inherent rights of Tribal Nations to protect their children and the imperative of preserving our cultural identity and political status as citizens of Tribal Nations. It remains clear—we must do more to strengthen families of Tribal Nations, which will require collaborative work from all levels, including Tribal and State leaders and the citizens thereof. (As reported by the Lakota Times, June 21, 2023)

The Supreme Court's upheld decision is a pivotal moment for justice, fairness, and Tribal Nation sovereignty.

Shanise Ka'aikala, a Legislative Analyst with NIEA, opened the discussion of Finding #6 with a review of some of the federal programs that are most relevant to the Whole Child Initiative.

NIEA partners with tribes, Native communities, and allies to ensure funding and increase allocations for Native education throughout the country. The majority of Native students attend school in rural or reservation communities that depend on federal funding to deliver culturally relevant programs that ensure an excellent education for our students. BIE and rural schools also report deterioration of facilities in schools with Native students, demonstrating the need to build new schools that provide a safe place to learn.

Approximately 620,000, or 93%, of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children are currently enrolled in public schools under state jurisdiction. The remaining 48,000, or 7%, of Native students attend schools within the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) system. Education sovereignty, including funding, is critical to ensuring the future vitality of Native communities. Many Native-serving schools have faced limited resources for decades or longer. Due to limited access to state and local taxes, Native-serving schools cannot collect taxes and are therefore reliant on federal programs, such as Impact Aid. And Native communities are often located in rural regions where economic growth is difficult unless Congress honors federal, constitutionally based funding obligations.

The majority of Native students do not have access to high-quality education options that are rooted in their language or culture – the core of their identity. Equity in education for Native students requires culture-based education options that provide opportunities for Native students to flourish in the classroom and beyond. Effectively reaching all Native students will require ongoing and meaningful consultation with Native nations, a coordinated effort from state and local education agencies, and a change in how the federal government fulfills its constitutionally based trust responsibility.

Whole Child Initiative & Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes several key provisions which aim to better support underserved children. However, as we look to Congress to reauthorize ESSA, it is imperative to incorporate an emphasis on healing centered education in important legislation.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, students across the country face a new landscape of stressors that continue to have a substantial impact on youths' mental health. For Native communities, the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing issues in our most vulnerable youth, especially those in the child welfare system.

Native Students under the Indian Child Welfare Act. The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was enacted in 1978 in response to the alarmingly high number of Indian children being removed from their homes by both public and private agencies.

Research found that American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children are overrepresented in state foster care at a rate 2.66 times greater than the general population and, although American Indian and Alaska Native children are just 1% of all children in the United States, they are four times as likely to have children taken and placed in foster care than non-Natives.

Before ICWA (1978), approximately 80% of Native families living on reservations lost at least one child to the foster care system, according to data compiled by the National Indian Child Welfare Association. Congress' intent under ICWA was to "Protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families" (25 U.S.C. § 1902).

ICWA sets federal requirements, which apply to state foster care, guardianship, termination of parental rights, and adoption proceedings involving an Indian child who is a member of, or eligible for membership in, a federally recognized tribe.

NIEA remains supportive of the strongest ICWA legislation possible, as Native students succeed the most when their communities are thriving.

Keeping families and communities together is essential to the mental and cultural wellbeing of our Native children and youth.

² "The Indian Child Welfare Act: A Family's Guide." Page 1. National Indian Child Welfare Association.

³ "Disproportionality in Child Welfare Fact Sheet." Page 1. 2021. NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION Education Sovereignty

Native Youth in the Juvenile System. Native youth are among the most vulnerable populations in the United States that have unmet needs. Native youth face higher rates of mental and physical health issues, poverty, alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, and exposure to violence. In addition, Native children living on reservations are subject to a complex jurisdictional scheme that puts these children at an even greater disadvantage.

Depending on where one commits an offense and the severity of the offense, Native youth may be subject to the laws of either state, federal, and/or tribal governments. Datasets of AI/AN juvenile justice statistics are complex due to the gray area between state, federal, and tribal civil and criminal jurisdictions.

Advocates, researchers, and federal reports have made clear the need to provide adequate support, treatment, and rehabilitation for Native communities.

NIEA Recommendations: Congress has made strides in addressing our most vulnerable youth and the need for fostering compassionate school practices through programs and legislation. However, additional work is needed to ensure that the federal government upholds its trust responsibilities to Native nations and to meet the needs of our Native youth in the child welfare and juvenile system.

- **Culturally Relevant Social Emotional Learning.** Programs that support Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), including Native languages and cultural programming are effective strategies in closing the achievement gap for Native youth and supporting rehabilitation. SEL strategies are effective in mitigating the effects of complex trauma and improving academic achievement. More resources must be given in remote areas, as well as implementation at the school and community levels. This includes integrated support systems such as mental health services, school-based and community-based health resources.
- **Fostering the Whole Child Approach.** The NIEA Whole Child Initiative seeks to reclaim the brilliance of our Native students through the power of Education Sovereignty. The goal of the Whole Child approach is to create a framework for ensuring community, family, and mental health are part of the academic wheel. This approach aims to close the gaps that fail to meet the mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of our Native students. NIEA, with assistance from the Center for Educational Improvement, is exploring how Compassionate School Practices can foster positive outcomes for Native students. The intent of the Compassionate School Practices model, developed by Yale University, is to respond to trauma and the needs of children in schools through four pathways: prevention, support, building resiliency, and developing protective factors. NIEA and CEI are committed to alleviating trauma, embracing greater equity, and creating healing school communities.
- **Protecting and Strengthening ICWA.** ICWA faces many challenges, including the recent Supreme Court Case *Brackeen v. Haaland*. Tribal Nations and Congress must work together to educate colleagues across the federal government on the benefits of ICWA, its relationship to good child welfare practices, and opportunities to strengthen ICWA implementation and protect the law at federal, state, and local levels.
- **Intergenerational Trauma and Culturally Appropriate Services.** The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy Act would establish a comprehensive examination of the Indian boarding school legacy and would ensure Native students, both past and present, have their stories heard and their traumas addressed. We urge Congress to pass this legislation and thoroughly own up to the negative effects of the boarding school era in Indian Country, including those effects that directly impact our students in the classroom today. This must also include culturally appropriate support services for students who attend both BIE-funded schools and public schools.



History and Impact of Boarding Schools

Experts estimate that approximately 500 government-funded Indian day and boarding schools operated in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries. Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their families by government agents and sent hundreds of miles away to these schools. If students spoke their Native languages, they were punished with beatings, starvation, and other forms of abuse. According to the National Native American NIEA [The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition](#).

Away from their parents, boarding school children did not develop proper parenting skills, knowledge of nurturing practices, or customary parental knowledge. Without a full cultural upbringing, combined with trauma experienced in boarding schools, Indian children were more at risk of abusing substances and experiencing high rates of mental health issues post boarding school. Few Indian children were able to restore their tribal identity or find healing after their culture was taken from them.

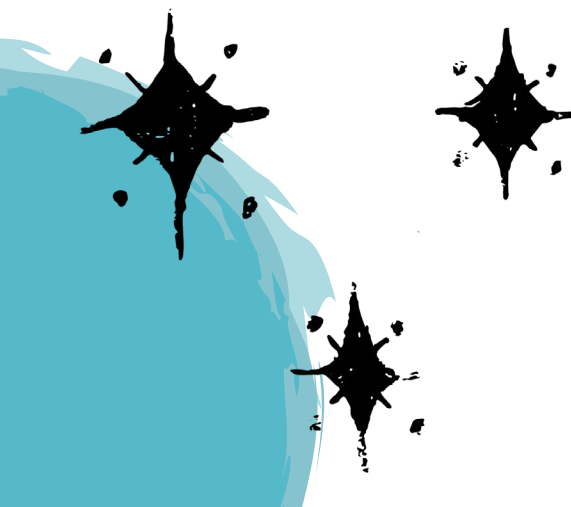
Source: Bachman, Berlin, Indian Health Service, and Freire were quoted by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Ph.D., and Lemyra M. DeBruyn, Ph.D

NIEA's Statement of Support for The Truth and Healing Commission emphasizes the paramount importance of the nation's acknowledgement and substantive atonement for Indian Boarding School Policies:

Native communities have suffered loss of traditional thought and philosophy, culture, language, identity, land, and resources since 1491. The purpose of the act is respected, however over 500 years of broken promises and failures to uphold the trust responsibility will require more than just written policies. For this act to make effective and lasting change, Native communities and the US government MUST communicate, collaborate, and trust to determine the most appropriate ways for healing to begin for Native people. We are encouraged by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland's announcement on June 22, 2021, of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, and this codification in law of such an initiative will ensure that this investigation and documentation continues under future administrations.
- National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

The Native American Teacher Education Pathway Act. Native education schools are unique models of education that build community pride and prepare our youth grounded through our Native languages, cultures, histories, worldviews, and pedagogies. One of the greatest challenges is the shortage of teachers trained for Native learning environments and the teaching of Native children. The Native American Teacher Education Pathway Act addresses this longstanding teacher shortage issue.

Several departments within the US Government, including the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and Department of the Interior, have programs that offer support and funding for programs directly impacting Native education.



FEDERAL PROGRAMS THAT IMPACT THE WHOLE CHILD

Department of Education

Elementary and Secondary Education

- English Language Acquisition, Indian Education, TEACH Grants
- New awards through the School-Based Mental Services and Mental Health Services Professional Development programs

Department of Health and Human Services

Administration for Native Americans (ANA)

- Strengthening Trauma Resiliency of Natives Grant (STRONG)
- Tribal Integrated Early Education Services
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Houses several wraparound services and grants that support mental health

Department of Interior

Bureau of Indian Education

Despite the critical role of the state government in supporting vulnerable populations like Native communities, there are ongoing issues with implementation and policies that fail to meet the needs and wants of the education system for these communities. As a result, those who are most susceptible to discrimination and trauma continue to face significant obstacles and are not receiving the support they require. Although there are challenges in providing support for vulnerable populations, there are individuals who remain committed to filling the gaps and advocating for change. To make progress, it's important to continue working together, speak up about our needs, and practice patience.

As one participant indicated, collaboration and networking is important,

I know that there's hope. We just have to have the right people in place at the right time. And the people on these calls need to hear this so that they can help.



Stigma, Equity, and Recognition of Expertise of Native Community Members.

To highlight some of the concerns voiced by participants regarding policy and systems, a participant described challenges for a specific Native population and people of color,

Everyone thinks [we are] a melting pot, but there are stigmas attached... One of difficulties is refusal to recognize traditional practitioners and what they call grandparents, who did not go to college or get University degrees but have the wisdom and knowledge ... But the Department of Education will not recognize the experience, and if they are offered a position, such as the [grandparents] program, that gets cultural experts into the classroom, to make connections to ancient practices, and contemporary society, they are paid at a part time rate, even though they possess all this valuable knowledge. They are paid at an Education Assistant rate. This is a slap in the face. Help us understand what your communities are doing for cultural practitioners on the same level as a teacher or a full professor.

The group agreed this needs to change. They were not aware of the inequities in staffing and pay for individuals who are cultural experts and felt that by devaluing the elders, the department was missing an opportunity to nurture students' sense of self and place through personal connection and pride in their Native culture. Advocates are placing more value on this than we do on the mainland.

It is also important to vote, speak out, and lobby for more compassionate and culturally sensitive laws to enact real change. An activist and teacher in an inner tribal Head Start classroom found that parents and teachers were very supportive of recent improvements in Oregon that came with Senate Bill 13, a law that directs the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to create K-12 Native American Curriculum for inclusion in Oregon public schools and delivers professional development to educators.

I live in Eugene Oregon and I'm a Klamath Tribal Member. I am in an inner tribal Head Start classroom. I also work as a TCAC [Tribal Consultation Advisory Committee] representative for ODE [Ohio Department of Education] and for OTELA [Ohio Test of English Language Acquisition] as well as for my tribe. I think it ties back to Senate Bill 13 that passed in Oregon, which is a great Bill in my opinion. It's where all nine federally recognized tribes in the state submit curriculum at different domains that are required by law to be taught. I'm also a TOSA [teacher on special assignment] representative for the 4J School District for Senate Bill 13, making sure that the curriculum is being used correctly and actually being implemented in the classroom.

Tribal history, shared history, is what it's called in Oregon, and it works. Teachers were very apprehensive last summer about implementing it in the classroom. What would parents think? What would other people say? Or they weren't comfortable sharing these kinds of things. Every tribe submitted training that went along with their curriculum that they submitted at a state level, and we made sure teachers, admin, school districts, all had access to all of that curriculum and training that tied back into the curriculum.



Another participant highlighted the critical importance of advocacy. Funding is a vital aspect of a majority of the eight areas of concern identified in the key findings of the discussions, and the participant highlighted the need for advocates and stakeholders to stay alert constantly to threats of funding cuts and complacency among decision-makers.

In order to preserve and protect our programs that we have, we definitely have to advocate for our Indian child. And with our consortium that we work with, whether it's writing those letters and advocating for them anytime tribal consultation meetings are held, trying to be active in that and going to those tribal consultation meetings to let them know who we are and making those tribal contacts, partnerships, collaboration efforts so that we can have the tribal support as well to back the programs that are already existing and maybe new programs that might be able coming down the road here. I do know at one time a particular program was almost zeroed out and without the Indian ed directors going to these tribal consultation meetings and voicing for the Indian child, it was able to be saved. So really advocating for our Indian child from pre-Ks on up through higher ed. I'm a pre-K through 12th grade educator, so that's my emphasis, but all areas.

Participants also discussed activism—what's worked for them and where activism is still desperately needed. One participant how adults needed to be more involved:

I think collectively we have to find a way to speak out. Our young people are watching us stand silent as these things happen and it's going to end up in the civil rights movement. It had to take children going to jail in order to make change and it shouldn't be that way. We should be the ones to stand up for them and speak up for them so that they don't have to fight this battle.



Research and Development

Daphne Littlebear, Research and Evaluation Manager at NIEA, addressed research and development

Native communities have been practicing community care—Whole Child approaches since time immemorial (physical health, mental health, identity, development, social emotional development, cognitive development, and academic development). Data and research on Native students and education is supported by recent and current legislation.

Daphne discussed NIEA's goal to build strategic partnerships with organizations conducting Whole Child research so they can work collaboratively. In doing this, NIEA strives to construct a repository of best practices and case studies around the whole child. Their aim with the listening sessions is to compile information and practices from organizations or urban native centers that may already be doing parts of this Whole Child work that NIEA is unaware of.

As the research and evaluation manager with NIEA, Daphne discussed the development of a research and evaluation department at NIEA. The department utilizes critical research methodologies to develop Indigenized approaches to research and evaluation.

Her current project is on decolonizing data and data sovereignty and why these are important for Indigenous education.

Out of current statistics on Indigenous peoples, Daphne lists the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes framework to the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Indian Education study not by the national assessment of educational progress but through the National Center for Education Statistics.

She lists current data and research by various organizations like the Department of Education Office of Indian Education, the National Center for Education Statistics, state assessments, and the National Student Clearinghouse nonprofit. All of this data is important because it drives current policies.

She asks:

- “What does that look like when data is collected by our people, by Native people, by tribal governments to support that paradigm shift?”
- “How do all these elements support the whole child?”
- “How do we construct the understanding of the whole child from a native perspective?”
- “What words or phrases will we use to describe the whole child model to our elders, parents, and children?”

She answers by: integrating Indigenous practices (teaching and celebrating native languages, oral stories, food, songs, dance) into our understanding and implementation of Whole Child frameworks.

NIEA's goal is to build strategic partnerships with organizations conducting Whole Child research so they can work collaboratively. In doing this, NIEA strives to construct a repository of best practices and case studies around the whole child.

NIEA research and development is using critical Native research methodologies to develop approaches for research and evaluation. They are currently:

- Leveraging strategic partnerships with organizations that engage in whole child research
- Learning from localized approaches to build a repository of best practices and case studies around the whole child
- Engaging in practices of data sovereignty and decolonizing data practices

Looking forward to the 118th congress (118th Congress-January 2023-January 2025), here are some of the most important components:

- **Native Histories and Cultures Education Act of 2022 (S. 3835/ H.R. 5444)**

Directs the National Museum of the American Indian (NMA) to develop curriculum on Native histories and cultures

Also awards grants to partnerships of state educational agencies and Indian tribes, tribal organizations, or develop Native histories and cultures education and implement these programs in elementary and secondary schools.

- **Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (S. 2907)**

This legislation would establish a congressional Truth and Healing Commission and develop recommendations on:

Protecting unmarked graves and accompanying land protections

Supporting repatriation and identifying the tribal nations from which children were taken

Discontinuing the removal of Native children from their families and tribal communities by state and social service departments, foster care agencies, and adoption agencies

These are supported by Congresswomen Tina Smith (Minn.) and Elizabeth Warren (Mass.).

Additional legislation calls for evaluation, research, and furthering our understanding of Native children and their families.

- **The Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act (S. 5186/ H.R. 9439)** is a comprehensive piece of legislation crafted in response to the Broken Promises Report from the US Commission on Civil Rights. This bill would affirm the Nation-to-Nation relationship between the government and Tribal Nations. Title III of the bill would supply mandatory funding for Tribal Colleges and Universities, address the Native teacher shortage and of teachers in Native-serving schools, and support Native language revitalization efforts.
- **The Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act (S 5186/ H.R. 9439)** would amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to improve nutrition in tribal areas.
- **The Mental Health of Educators and Staff Act of 2023 (H.R. 744)** would establish grants and require other activities to improve mental and behavioral health among education professionals and school staff.

These are supported by Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, Teresa Leger Fernandez, and Elizabeth Warren. Several data sets (see next page)

SURVEY COLLECTIONS	SUPPORTING AGENCY
Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework	US Department of Health and Human Services
National Indian Education Study, National Assessment of Educational Progress	NIES is conducted under the direction of the National Center for Education Statistics through the National Assessment of Educational Progress on behalf of the US Department of Education's Office of Indian Education
Bureau of Indian Education	US Department of the Interior
State Assessments	Assessments of student learning are required to be administered by State Education agencies under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act
Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System	US Department of Education, National Center Education Statistics
AIHEC American Indian Measurements of Success	American Indian Higher Education Consortium
National Student Clearinghouse	National Student Clearinghouse – Research Center



Reframing from a Native Perspective

According to Daphne, Native communities have been practicing community care and Whole Child approaches since time immemorial. Moreover, as Native education demonstrates, there is a resurgence of reclaiming such practices. Native languages, oral stories, foods, songs, dances, and many additional lifeways provide teachings in how we see the whole child.

Referencing the work of the Learning Policy Institute (see page 17), the task at hand is how to construct the understanding of Whole Child from a Native perspective?

- How would we define each of these components in the Whole Child model in a Native perspective?
- What words or phrases would we use to describe the Whole Child model to our elders, parents, and children?

Federal Policies, Funding, and Programs

Educators who work with Native youth are noticing an erasure of shared history, a heavy emphasis on Western colonized versions of education standards and curricula, and a lack of systems to support Native youth with their unique experiences and challenges. With that comes a feeling of disengagement from these young learners - if it seems like the adults around them can't truly see them for who they are and what their experiences have been, why would they buy into their education? Many educators are seeing Native youth completely disengage from school, and, in some cases, lash out and find themselves in trouble both in school and in their communities.

While educators of Native youth provided many personal anecdotes about their frustrations with policy (or lack thereof) governing Native education, adequate funding must be allocated to research and disseminate information about these concerns. Until issues are seen as legitimate and funding is allocated for research to better identify priority concerns, it will be challenging to see any real change.

Specific state funding should be earmarked to study and improve Native education. Some educators have suggested that this could come from a portion of money collected by casinos that are owned and operated by Native tribes. This would require a critical look at the structure of revenue collected by gaming monies, but it could be a natural step to improve the study and implementation of quality education for Native youth. An educator in New Mexico has found that her tribe has been on the hook for funding when it comes to comprehensive Native education:

Educators who work with Native youth are noticing an erasure of shared history, a heavy emphasis on Western colonized versions of education standards and curricula, and a lack of systems to support Native youth with their unique experiences and challenges. With that comes a feeling of disengagement from these young learners.

I know for some states, they might have it in there that Native studies is mandated in the school system, but it's up to the Native community to fund that portion of the curriculum. And I think that funding needs to be included in any of those policies that's created for that.



An independent educator in the Tijuana described her school's approach to using federal funding for education:

I teach programs out of the Salmon Civilization Program, which offers programs that incorporate tribal perspectives into the classroom. I use the Since Time Immemorial Washington curriculum as well as now we have an Oregon curriculum tribal history/shared history. I work with ages third grade through 12th. I am a guest teacher every year at the Nixyaawii Tribal High School in the Umatilla Res. I also do teacher training, and right now I'm working with Lyle School in Washington to get a program going with the Title VI funding of how to make the school more inviting to the tribal kids. At Dufur School in Oregon, we're trying to do that too. So, I'm mainly in rural schools where we have a lot of tribal families that live along the river that never went to the reservations. So, I work a lot with those kids.

What's more, some schools that are promised federal funding to support the education of Native youth are not seeing all of the money that is owed to them. A participant from the Southwest voices their frustrations with federal education funding:

... our state was withholding 75% of our Impact Aid school funds. We lobbied our state legislature and got them, it took three years, but we got them to reverse that. And so now, we get 100% of our Impact Aid dollars, which is obviously really important. But what I noticed from that is the level of lack of knowledge, misunderstanding that folks have about these issues.

And so, from my perspective, probably the biggest blockage or hurdle is lack of understanding. And really, that's on us in some ways because we have to help folks understand. What I found was when I sat down with legislators who were pretty adamant about not giving our school district 100% of our Impact Aid funds and helped them understand it at a human level, the whole thing shifted. Now, it took a while, but that's what I see.

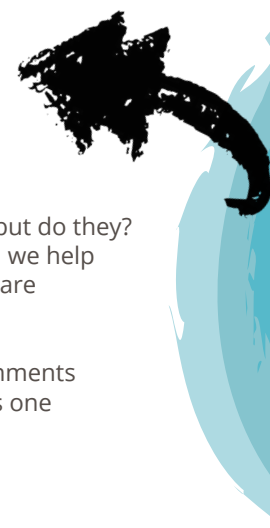
Helping Families Navigate Public School Systems.

Another participant explained:

We need to help our families navigate public school systems. We assume Native families know how, but do they? How do they navigate special education, handbooks, knowing what resources are available? How can we help them through the process? Be an advocate for students in the public school system. Native students are sometimes dismissed. Just being an advocate goes a long way.

While broad policies may be in place to support Native youth, it's essential that local and state governments assess these policies often to determine their effectiveness and identify where there may be gaps. As one participant suggested:

Could that maybe be a part of maybe a portion of taxes, like our state taxes being specific for education, Native Indian education or even with our casinos, our gaming monies, we have those compacts, the tribal state compacts, and a portion goes back to the state? So why not earmark that for Indian education to kind of go along with Title VI federal funding? Maybe that could be something that we can try... As far as legislation goes, why not have those gaming money that come from our tribal casinos go back to our Indian education maybe?



One of the facilitators responded, describing how in Minnesota 50 tribes are supporting each other:

First is the continued support in funding for our Title VI programs. I live in an urban district, teaching in an urban district in Rochester, Minnesota, and our students come from about 50 different tribes. Our Title VI program and our Indian Parent Committee has become our community that we rally around each other, support each other because we're not on a reservation and we're not near a reservation. We have so many different tribes represented. That's our lifeline, and without that, I don't think our district would really support us if we weren't getting some financial support to run our programs.

Another responded, indicating a need to negotiate tribal compacts when casinos are set up with funds earmarked for Indian education:

I do know that what I was told when those compacts were made for the gaming education dollars, if they were not designated as that, then it just goes into a big pot at the state level. Because I did ask a particular tribal leader, "Could you not request whatever, 1%, 2% go designated to Indian education?" And if it was not designated like that, then it's not going to happen like that. I think that's how I was told, and they already agreed to the compact. So, I guess maybe asking our tribal leaders too, if they have to renegotiate tribal compacts, to try to request that, I'm not too sure. I'm not a tribal leader, so I'm not sure how that works with them.

One participant described a need for more specific legislation in New Mexico to facilitate implementation of priorities for Indian education. Another reflected on the lack of Native representation and the importance of lobbying to fight for 100% of Impact Aid dollars to go to Indian Education:

I think that we definitely need more Native representation with those individuals who make these decisions. So, when you see the panel of decision makers, how many Native representatives are there, and then make sure it's not just tribal leaders, but also those in the community. Because that's really where you're going to hear the true voices of the community is whenever you reach those individuals within the community and not just tribal leaders. Also in that legislation, include funding in there too, because I know for some states, they might require that Native studies is mandated in the school system, but it's up to the Native community to fund that portion of the curriculum. And I think that funding needs to be included in any of those policies that are created for that.

Museums also present an opportunity to help support teaching accurate history. As a participant from Oklahoma indicated,

I think about, like I had said, I had worked for my tribe previously, and we actually had toolkits that we made through our museum that educators could come and check out, so they would be able to teach accurate history on Citizen Potawatomi Nation in the area. So just thinking about Oklahoma's home of 39 tribes, if we had every tribe that would have accurate history to be taught in the school system, how amazing that would be. So just something that we did in our education department previously ... Somebody mentioned in the chat Burke Museum in Seattle has a similar program. Beth set it up.



Whole Child Initiative Best Practices

When it comes to ensuring the rights of Native youth, representation matters. Whether it's the local school board, a tribal leadership position, or state and federal government, having Native individuals hold political positions is essential for many reasons. Many Native youth feel like they are not valued based on how they and their families have been treated for generations. By seeing Native people in positions of power in local, state, and federal government, Native youth can see someone that looks like them fighting for their rights.

When it comes to ensuring the rights of Native youth, representation matters. Whether it's the local school board, a tribal leadership position, or state and federal government, having Native individuals hold political positions is essential for many reasons.

Without the lived experience of Native individuals in the room, policymakers are making decisions blindly and without the best interest of the people that they are attempting to support. A participant provided a vehement plea for Native families to get involved in local politics:

We are urging people, parents, families, educators to go to school board meetings, to support school boards that are really, for the most part, very supportive of these initiatives that we have. I really feel like we're limiting academic freedom with some of the things that are happening in schools right now, so it's very important to be involved at the local level. Whatever you can do to help promote that, to round people up, to support them, to help make sure that they're aware of what's going on, because in some ways this kind of snuck up on us. There's a very well-defined orchestrated movement to try to take us back, I don't know if it's 30, or 40 years, 50 years, a decade, 2000 decades, I mean, it's ridiculous. What we need to do is speak out and encourage others too. We can do this within NIEA, you can do this in your local communities, you can do this with allies.

The Whole Child focuses on the whole child being raised by the whole family, community, and tribe, with responsibility and participation of extended family members and tribal leaders. The tribe's history and culture is passed to the new generation through practical and cultural learning activities.

Whole Child best practices also apply to formal education and ensuring that shared history is taught in schools. Shared history refers to the true tribal history in America, including the painful truth of how those conflicts with what is often taught in Westernized history courses in the United States. Educators believe that teaching shared history, while sometimes controversial and often uncomfortable, is essential to fighting back against colonized erasure of Native people.

Shared history refers to the true tribal history in America, including the painful truth of how those conflicts with what is often taught in Westernized history courses in the United States. Educators believe that teaching shared history, while sometimes controversial and often uncomfortable, is essential to fighting back against colonized erasure of Native people.

In 2017, the state legislature in Oregon enacted Senate Bill 13, a law that mandates that shared history is taught in schools, and educators are given professional development to support their understanding and implementation of that curriculum. Policies such as Oregon's Senate Bill 13 give gravitas to the essentiality of the Native experience when it comes to comprehensive education.

Even without specific state legislation, school administrators and school board leaders can fight for improved local policy within their districts. An educator from Oklahoma worked with her tribe (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) and a local tribal museum to develop toolkits for educators to utilize in their classrooms to teach accurate tribal history. If every tribe and every school implemented a similar practice, educators could make strides towards a comprehensive Native education. The onus of change shouldn't all be on individual teachers, though. Systemic changes to policy must be made at the local and state level to ensure that schools have the resources, professional development, and funding to give Native youth the education that they deserve.

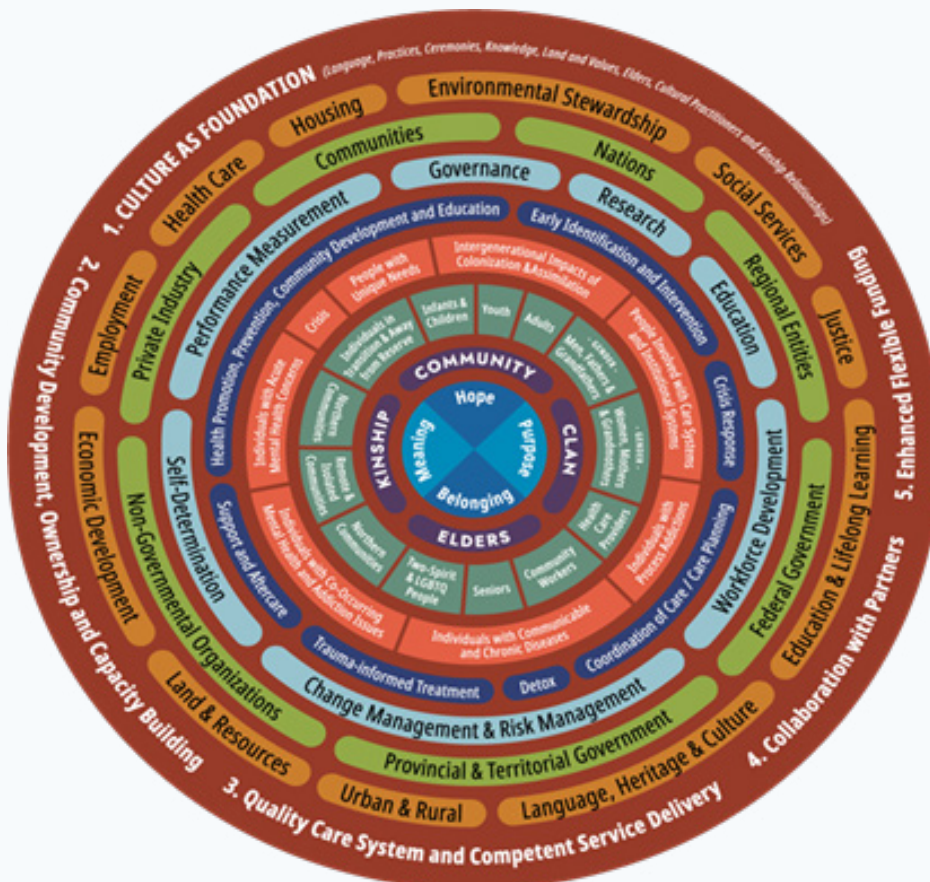
Limitations: Participants highlighted their concerns about the underrepresentation of Native Communities, stating, "The community is where the true voice lies—those within it, not just tribal leaders."

Allies and Coalition Building

Melanie Johnson and Raquel Ramos described how NIEA could work with other individuals and organizations to expand support for the Whole Child Initiative.

Referencing the Thunderbird Foundation's First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Summary Report (2015), Melanie explained the interrelationship of components with Hope, Purpose, Meaning, and Belonging at the center of a series of expanding circles.

Given that cultural connectedness serves as a protective factor against the psychosocial risks associated with trauma, there is a high need for solutions for Native folks by Native folks (Brave Heart, 1998). The aim of these listening sessions is to augment the voices of Native people to discuss strengths, challenges and barriers, and potential solutions and empower Native communities to brainstorm next steps in terms of approaches, policies, and solutions that promote Native American youth's well-being, happiness, and success in school and beyond. (See Figure below.)



<https://thunderbirdpf.org/?resources=first-nations-mental-wellness-continuum-framework-summary-report-2>

Legend (from centre to outer ring)	
	Four Directions (outcomes) — <i>Hope; Belonging; Meaning; Purpose.</i>
	Community — <i>Kinship, Clan, Elders; Community.</i>
	Populations — <i>Infants and Children; Youth; Adults; Gender— Men, Fathers, and Grandfathers; Gender— Women, Mothers, and Grandmothers; Health Care Providers; Community Workers; Seniors; Two-Spriti People and LGBTQ; Families and Communities; Remote and Isolated Communities; Northern Communities; Individuals in Transition and Away from Reserve.</i>
	Specific Population Needs — <i>Intergenerational Impacts of Colonization and Assimilation; People Involved with Care Systems and Institutional Systems; Individuals with Process Addictions; Individuals with Communicable and Chronic Diseases; Individuals with Co-occurring Mental Health and Addiction Issues; Individuals with Acute Mental Health Concerns; Crisis; People with Unique Needs.</i>
	Continuum of Essential Services — <i>Health Promotion Prevention; Community Development and Education; Early Identification and Intervention; Crisis Response; Coordination of Care and Care Planning; Detox; Trauma-informed Treatment; Support and Aftercare.</i>
	Supporting Elements — <i>Performance Measurement; Governance; Research; Education; Workforce Development; Change and Risk Management; Self-determination.</i>
	Partners in Implementation — <i>Non-governmental Organizations; Provincial and Territorial Governments; Federal Government; Regional Entities; Nations; Communities; Private Industries.</i>
	Indigenous Social Determinants of Health — <i>Environmental Stewardship; Social Services; Justice; Education and Lifelong Learning; Language; Heritage and Culture; Urban and Rural; Land and Resources; Economic Development; Employment; Health Care; Housing.</i>
	2.- 5. Key Themes for Mental Wellness — <i>Community Development, Ownership and Capacity Building; Quality Care System and Competent Service Delivery; Collaboration with Partners; Enhanced Flexible Funding.</i>
	1. Culture as Foundation — <i>Elders; Cultural Practitioners: Kinship Relationships; Language; Practices; Ceremonies; Knowledge; Land; Values.</i>

Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, (2015). First Nations mental wellness continuum framework summary report. Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation Inc.).


Dr. Mason also described opportunities to join with CEI and its Coalition for the Future of Education (<https://www.edimprovement.org/coalition-future-education>). The vision of CEI's Coalition follows:

We envision a world that leans in with heart and compassion for self, others, and our environment, where people and institutions are dedicated to expanding conscious acts of caring, building resiliency, and advancing learning, equity, and justice.

We envision safe and equitable schools with education that serves as the foundation for our humanity; it is flexible and empowering. There is room for adventure, students drive their own learning, learning and self-understanding are celebrated, and communities support their individual and collective self-care, and well-being. (Coalition for the Future of Education, 2021).

Coalitions can give power to individuals working for the same goal by providing strength in numbers and also by potentially raising funds. Many participants were members and leaders of coalitions in their communities and expressed enthusiasm for NIEA's goal of building a national coalition for the future of Native youths' education and a federally recognized Indigenous whole child approach.

Other Comments on Coalition Building. Some participants described their experiences from building and joining coalitions,

- 
- So early on, whenever I learned about coalitions in my community, they told me that I needed to have 12 sectors. Faith-based, health, youth, parent, teacher, just every, all 12 sectors of an actual community. And so, in my mind I thought, we don't have that. Comanche Nation doesn't have all of these things separately. We don't have a health system and so on. And so, it took me a minute to realize that yes, we do have it within our tribal communities.
 - We may not have a medical center, however, we do have CHR, we do have IHS. We have our Native American Church, which is our faith, our spirituality, at least for Comanche Nation. And so I ended up bringing in the sectors that I became comfortable with. However, there was a caveat when it comes to being able to see and make sure that everybody was included because we lived in a diverse community.
 - So, my first coalition, you generally have anywhere from 10 to 12 members. I had 34 consistent members when I created I Am Indian. Because not only did I include our tribal police from Comanche Nation, I also included our city police and our local police in this coalition. And then being able to assess our community to see where those gaps were in building capacity.
 - And that's where our healing came in. We started doing GONA trainings [Gathering Of Native Americans]. And so, it was just a process to be able to learn and follow the SPIF process, the Strategic Prevention Framework process. And then we realized that it did not fit... and so we realized that just because there is a SPF model, does not make it, it didn't fit the language of our tribal communities.
 - I'll shout out a little bit. Here in [a Southwestern state], there's a lot of different sub-coalitions around different focuses for Native communities. The one amazing thing that I see is that these coalitions, whether they're environmental justice coalitions, whether they're focused on murdered and missing Native women in that initiative, or domestic violence or, the one amazing thing I see is that they're providing supplemental wraparound curriculum to the public schools in their areas.
 - We also connected with different service providers outside of the tribe because I would say 90% of our students within my pueblo attend public schooling. And so, if there was anything that they needed first, we wanted to make sure that the school was aware that there were services provided through the tribe to reach to the tribe first and to work with any outside agencies that had to provide additional services to the students. So, I think the whole child model is there in some of our respected communities. We just haven't put it on paper.
 - I am here because we are hoping to partner with the NIEA and would like to get some information on how we can best provide support to Native children and families. So, I'm just listening.

Parent, Family and Community Involvement and Coalition Building

In building coalitions, parental and family involvement is essential, as are conversations between educators and tribal leaders and partners. Such involvement will help weaken stereotypes and promote positive Native-centered identity development. Educators and policymakers need to communicate more effectively with parents and increase equitable access to school surveys, engaging parents and building trust.

As families are involved, necessary counseling, mental health, and addiction services need to be available to serve both the student and their community. Families extend beyond the immediate family, and provisions and protocol need to be established for engaging elders and supporting multigenerational storytelling.

Some of the limitations include difficulties in reaching parents (e.g., rural communities) and getting parents to cooperate. However, since Native students are and have been 10 times more likely to receive disciplinary action than other students, this exacerbates intergenerational trauma and the need for more family involvement. As we foster such involvement, educators must recognize that parents and grandparents have traumatic relationships with school systems due to boarding schools and assimilation, and that schools must address the healing that is needed.

How do schools communicate important information to parents/caregivers and get their opinions on essential school matters? As technology rapidly advances, schools tend to lean on electronic forms of communication such as email, classroom blogs, and school and district websites. While this is a preferred method of information sharing for many, educators who serve Native youth are finding that not all of their families have reliable access to the Internet nor electronic devices such as phones or computers.

When it comes to receiving information about what is going on in their child's school, individuals who don't have access to such things are often left in the dark. Schools should be mindful of this when disseminating resources and come up with creative ways to get important information out to families. In addition, schools must be cognizant of translating documents into the Native languages of the families that they serve. This way, all families can be part of the conversation around school happenings and improvements.



Culturally competent communication is especially important when considering cultural and language surveys that are sent home by school districts to survey the population that they serve. When all members of a particular town or tribe can share demographic data on their households, schools can be best equipped to serve the students that are in their schools each day. This information is also vital for reporting state data and qualifying for funding to help improve education outcomes for students.

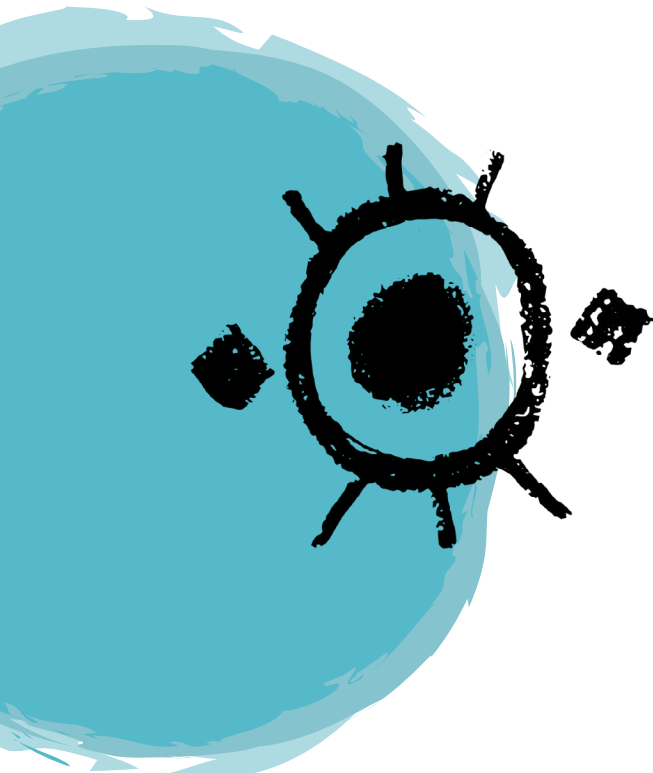
A participant explained the process of creating a coalition and how it required identifying and including all 12 sectors of the community, including faith-based, health, youth, parent, and teacher sectors. Despite not having all 12 sectors within their tribal community, the participants brought in the sectors they were comfortable with and included various police departments in the coalition. The coalition assessed the community's gaps and built capacity, including healing through GONA (Gathering Of Native Americans) trainings. With the addition of tribal language for a Native twist, they adhered to the Strategic Prevention Framework process.

In their previous role in the Tribal Education Department, a participant collaborated with external service providers to provide resources to Native people, emphasizing the importance of making schools and students aware of the tribe's services for additional support and need. The speaker asserts that the whole child model is present in their communities, but it has not been officially documented.

Another local coalition, The Public Action Alliance, supplies land-based curriculum to students at the Native American Community Academy and organizes a speaker series with Jemez Pueblo at the Santa Fe Indian School. They also offer additional curriculum to students and summer programming on causes they support, as noted by Daphne Littlebear, NIEA Research and Evaluation Manager, formally with the Tribal Education Department,

I'll add too, I used to work, my career began working for my tribe for the Tribal Education Department. And one thing that we did a lot was to reach out to all of the different service areas within the tribal government, whether it be social services, environmental, our environmental department, or even our businesses. And we tried to create year round programming within our community.

Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, (2015). First Nations mental wellness continuum framework summary report. Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation Inc.). Accessed April 27, 2023.



VI. Methodology

The sessions were held via Zoom and recorded and transcribed on March 1st, 15th, and 30th of 2023. Each session had four breakout rooms with guiding questions such as overall satisfaction with Native education and which NIEA policies participants found most pressing. Each room included a NIEA and CEI facilitator as well as around ten participants who responded to the different prompts. Breakout room session prompts are included in Appendix A.

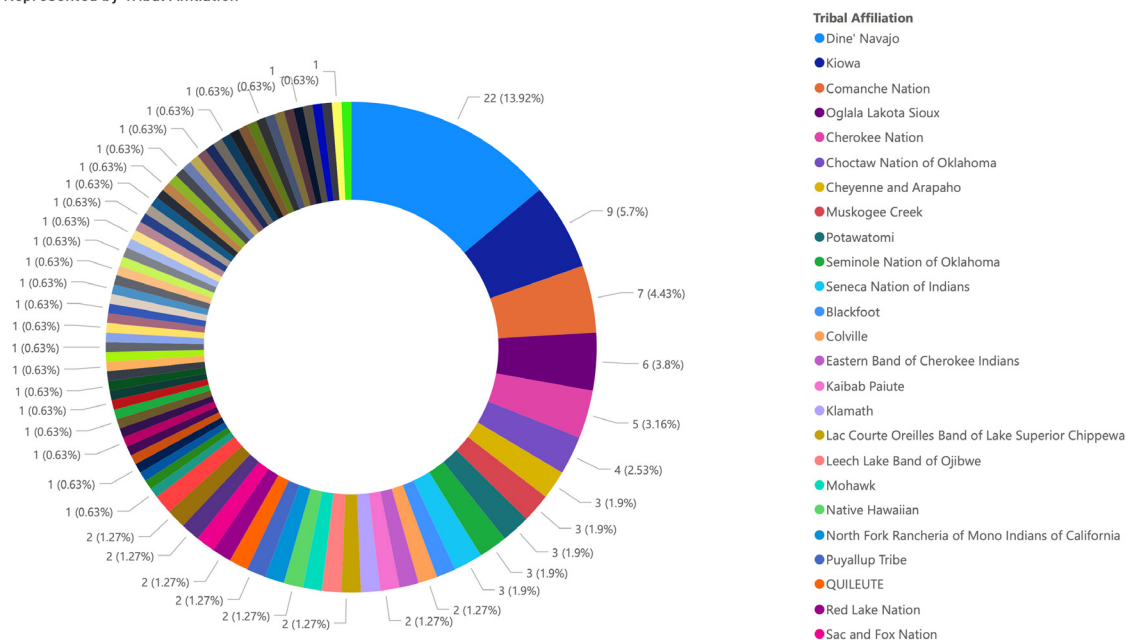
Participants

A total of 520 educators, policymakers, and family members registered for the three NIEA listening sessions, and 5% of those registered for more than one session. Two hundred and fifteen registered for Session 1; 102 participants registered for Session 2, with 44 identifying as members of a federally recognized tribe; and 283 participants registered for Session 3, with 119 identifying as members of a tribe. During these sessions, 18 staff and consultants served as facilitators for the breakout rooms. Of the 520 registrants, about 40% (238) participated during the live events – however, all registrants were given access to slides and were able to provide feedback online.

Participants across all three sessions included members from 81 Tribes, with 22 identifying as Navajo/Dine, ten as Kiowa, eight as Lakota, and seven each as either Cherokee, and Cheyenne/Arapaho, or Bishop Paiute. Participants came from 41 states, 73 from Oklahoma, 44 from Washington, 32 from Arizona, 31 from California, and 31 from Minnesota. For Sessions 2 and 3, 42% of the registrants identified as citizens of a Native tribe.

Of those who indicated an organizational affiliation, participants represented 24 agencies or organizations. Of those who indicated an organizational affiliation, participants most frequently represented a school or school district, followed by “other” affiliation (not listed), then as a “family” or “family member” in a school district, and finally as a representative in a government agency. Of those participants who indicated their job title, 50 positions were described, with the title of “Director of Services” as most frequent, followed by “Educator,” “Coordinator,” and “Mental Health Professional.” “Policy Maker” was the least frequent job title.

Count of Tribes Represented by Tribal Affiliation



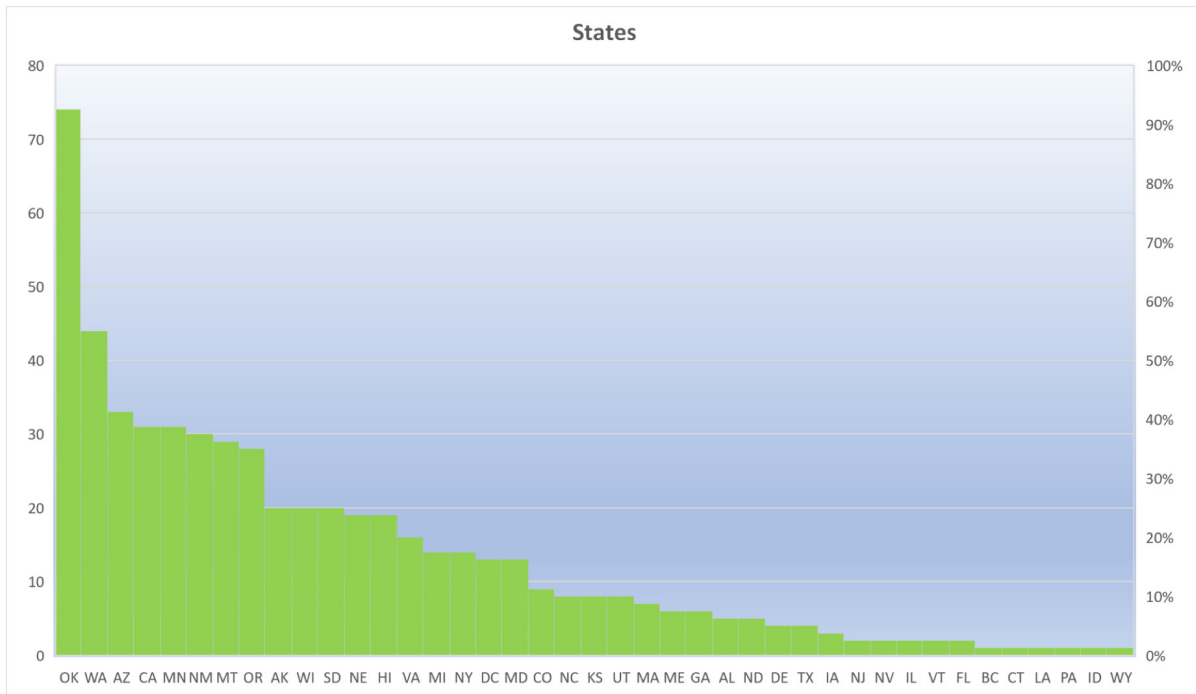


- Yakama
- Yankton Sioux
- Absentee Shawnee
- Afognak and Koniag (Alaska)
- Alaska Native, Tlingit
- Apache Tribe of Oklahoma
- Bishop Paiute Tribe
- Cheyenne River Lakota Oyate
- Cheyenne River Sioux
- Chippewa-Creek
- Crow (Apsaalooke)
- Curyung
- Dakelh
- Eastern Shoshone
- Fort Peck-MT
- Grand Ronde
- Ho-Chunk of Winnebago
- Inupiaq
- Jemez
- Ketchikan Indian Community
- Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe
- Lenni Lenape
- Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana
- Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe
- Makah Tribe
- Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- MHA Nation
- Minnesota Chippewa Tribe - Leech Lake
- Muckleshoot
- Nakoda
- Native Village of Perryville
- Nez Perce
- Nome Eskimo Community
- Ojibwe
- Omaha Nation of Nebraska
- Oneida
- Osage Nation
- Otoe-Missouria
- Paiute
- Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma
- Pomo
- Ponca
- Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma
- Pueblo of Santa Ana
- Quapaw
- Reno-Sparks Indian Colony
- Rosebud Sicangu Lakota
- Round Valley Yuki, Wailaki
- Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe
- San Felipe Pueblo
- Spokane Tribe
- Standing Rock
- Taino
- The Tulalip
- Tohono O'odham Nation
- Wasco Palouse
- Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska
- Yankton Sioux Tribe



Tribes represented by 2 or more people.

Members of 81 tribes participated in the listening sessions, including 28 tribes that were represented by two or more people. For a complete listing of tribal representation see Appendix B.



Breakout room sessions were recorded and transcribed. The procedures for analyzing the qualitative data were loosely derived from an empirical phenomenological framework in which narrative analysis is used to identify and delineate the common structural elements, or themes, that were found across the participants. These procedures proceeded as follows. The transcripts were distributed among the data analysis team, including the research team leaders. Each team member then began to create narratives for each breakout room session. The completed narratives were then shared with separate team members for analysis, including a review of the original transcript. Each team member reviewed and analyzed the transcripts and narratives independently, coding the data for recurrent themes characterizing each session. The team met to discuss their findings and review and compare the themes they had identified, coming to a general agreement on the important themes in each narrative. Through this process, the team created a list of themes and sub-themes found across the narratives, using this list to analyze subsequent narratives. From this, a general edited synthesis was produced representing descriptions of participants' experiences participating in the sessions.



V. Discussion and Implications

More than anything, the results of the NIEA's listening sessions reveal the extensive thought, interest, commitment, and expertise of Native people essential to developing a Whole Child vision and framework for educating Native children and youth. The vision of the conveners and participants was to explore an approach building on the historical wisdom and cultures of Native people – a vision for educational sovereignty, healing, and a return to tribal ways of knowing and learning.

The findings from the listening sessions highlight the need to use Native teaching methods, reintroduce Native languages and cultures, and acknowledge the traditions of individual tribes rather than put everything under an umbrella of “Native practices” without options for input and control by individual, local tribes (Fortier et al., 2018, Kulis et al., 2017). In any initiatives designed to serve Native people, findings emphasize the importance of Native scholars, community members, elders, and youth as critical contributors in the planning and implementation processes (Smith et al., 2022; Okamoto et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2018). Moreover, to realize the vision of a Native-centered education, changes in policy, funding, and teacher preparation and certification are needed, as is the support of allies who will stand beside Native leaders to assist in coalition building, with Native governance and Native leadership. To fundamentally change the country's perspective on and treatment of Native people, these changes need to be applied first to those schools serving Native children but also to all children.

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Remembering History and Addressing Intergenerational Trauma

Colonization sought to erase the Native American experience, and its effects are felt profoundly at the school level, where Native history, values, practices, and excellence have been minimized, altered, or eliminated. Without a clear sense of direction or unified approach to preserving Native values in our schools, we risk further erasing many intricate and essential elements of Native cultures in our society. Educators and policymakers must critically examine how Native schools operate, including how student progress is measured by assessments developed by a colonized educational system.

By better equipping teachers to support Native learners, we intend to ensure a compassionate school environment for all, giving Native children a sense of identity and importance in this country's history and culture.

By better equipping teachers to support Native learners, we intend to ensure a compassionate school environment for all, giving Native children a sense of identity and importance in this country's history and culture. Educators should partner with community members, integrate Native language into the curriculum, and lean into culturally conscious 21st-century teaching practices.

Yet, we must not be naïve; much work remains to build capacity and sustainability. As documented in numerous writings, including K. Tsianima Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty's *To Remain an Indian* (2004), there are many challenges. Since the 1920's interference from non-Natives, including many acting in the capacity of educational or governmental leaders, has impeded many promising practices. Many efforts to establish Native sovereignty or infuse Native practices and traditions in schools have been blocked by heavy handed policies that demonstrated a total disregard for Native people's wishes and wisdom.

Moreover, as we consider the needs of Native students, we must not lose sight of the fact that the trauma experienced by Native people in the United States is pervasive, historical, and ongoing. Much of the trauma began centuries ago with genocide, colonization, and the erasure of tribal knowledge and culture. The historical erasure of Native American culture and people in the United States has profoundly impacted Native individuals' experience of trauma and the prevalence of mental health concerns. Native populations experience higher exposure to trauma and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than non-Native populations (Spillane et al., 2022). Moreover, Native youth are 2.5 times more likely to experience a traumatic experience than their non-Native peers, and 22% of these youth experience PTSD, three times the rate experienced by the general population (Dorgan et al., 2014; Robin et al., 1996).

Deep Healing and a Holistic Approach

Deep healing is necessary to repair the wounds, inequities, injustices, and systematic efforts to eradicate or assimilate Native people into a system designed by, led by, and regulated by non-Native people. Each Native adult and child has been scarred by the history of actions taken against Native people, broken treaties, and intentional efforts to remove Native people from their lands and destroy their cultures and identities. This healing must include adequate access to mental health and wraparound supports and substance abuse programs and adherence to compassionate healing practices, all developed with the meaningful involvement of Native communities.

The NIEA's Whole Child listening sessions have elicited explicit recommendations calling for establishing an education model with a core emphasis on the holistic development of the Native Child. This model should be based on promising practices oriented specifically to Native youth and respecting Native sovereignty. These sessions focused on recognizing the unique strengths and needs of individual tribes, fostering empathetic healing, facilitating the development of responsive policy as critical values in research, identifying potential resources and contributors, and providing financial support to implement change. But those methods alone are not sufficient to enact meaningful change. Evaluation of the needs and impact must involve decolonizing data and research that includes reducing reliance on culturally insensitive intelligence and school curricula measures. Culturally appropriate measures that are sensitive to Native beliefs, traditions, and teachings need to be used. Ultimately, tribes need support in identifying and securing financial aid that is meaningful and ongoing through active advocacy, effective communication, and policy modifications to tear down systemic barriers and foster equitable opportunities.

Deep healing is necessary to repair the wounds, inequities, injustices, and systematic efforts to eradicate or assimilate Native people into a system designed by, led by, and regulated by non-Native people.

These listening sessions and this report underscore the complex and pressing educational needs of Native children and their communities, including the requirement for culturally-responsive curricula, access to comprehensive healthcare and mental health services, supportive learning environments, and increased representation of Native educators. These sessions unearthed substantial gaps in current research and practice that call for a deeper understanding of these children's experiences and unique educational journeys.



A Renewed Sense of Hope

Despite the enduring trauma and inequities faced by Native communities and despite the many needs of Native people, these listening sessions shed light on a renewed sense of hope. This optimism stems from the self-determined efforts that Native communities have initiated to influence education and policy landscapes. Additionally, hope is fostered by ensuring students learn the authentic history of the land's original inhabitants, including the candid acknowledgment of the extreme acts of violence within American history, appropriately termed as genocide. To fortify Native communities, there is a compelling need to develop novel legislation aimed at safeguarding tribal existence and natural resources, stimulating economic development and community infrastructure, and redressing historical injustices.

Optimism also lies in progressive educational reforms in states like Washington, South Dakota, Montana, Oregon, Minnesota, and New Mexico, where Indigenous history and languages are systematically integrated into the curricula. Equally promising are the efforts to modify teacher certification requirements to prepare educators to engage with Indigenous communities in ways that identify and diminish bias, promote equity, and advance cultural competence. This holistic approach honors the resilience and strength of Indigenous communities and fosters an environment conducive to their thriving success.

Optimism also lies in progressive educational reforms in states like Washington, South Dakota, Montana, Oregon, Minnesota, and New Mexico, where Indigenous history and languages are systematically integrated into the curricula.

The message from the NIEA Listening sessions was clear: “hope” requires concrete action. This vision of “doing”—of compassionate action, leadership, equity, and full participation—requires a paradigm shift that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings and honors all people. This must be accomplished by applying ancestral knowledge to build the foundations for healing, resiliency, and conscious awareness of our obligations to each other, our children, and our elders. The hope of Native people involves integrity, inspiration, and collective action as we tear down barriers, teach and learn together, stand as allies, protect one another, find justice, and honor the greatness of each individual, each family, and each community.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

To achieve a unified vision that is sensitive to the uniqueness of each tribe, future discussion and analysis should focus on developing tailored, evidence and experience-based interventions that genuinely respond to these needs and empower Native students to thrive academically, emotionally, and culturally. Future action must include dialogue and input from Native people at tribal, state, and regional levels with a priority on capacity building and sustainability. This will involve policy building, research, and collaboration with allies who support Native leadership. With concerted efforts from all stakeholders, we can create a path to an education system that celebrates diversity, fosters inclusion, and enables every student to achieve their full, powerful potential.

Despite the challenges that lie ahead, we remain optimistic. Thus far, the progress inspires hope for a brighter future where Native children are given the educational resources, support, and opportunities they need to flourish.

VI. Speaker Bios and Acknowledgments

Diana Cournoyer, Oglala Sioux Tribe, NIEA Executive Director

Through her passion and enthusiasm for supporting Native students, Diana has been a critical driver in expanding NIEA's work beyond the halls of the U.S. Capitol to communities across Indian Country. She has helped shape broader teacher hiring initiatives, created more opportunities for visits to tribal communities, acquired millions in grant funding for NIEA, testified before the US Congress in support of Native education, and inspired professional trust and collaboration among staff, colleagues, organizations and Native nations across the country. Her work has ensured that Native students have the best possible outcomes and educators have the best resources to support their efforts. Cournoyer directs the staff in carrying out the organization's Strategic Plan, which includes: Advocacy; Building Tribal Education Capacity; Culture-Based Education; Skilled Teachers and Leaders; Establishing Educational Standards, Assessments, and Accountability; and Post-Secondary Success.

Jennifer DePaoli, Learning Policy Institute

Jennifer DePaoli is a Senior Researcher at the Learning Policy Institute and co-leads LPI's Whole Child Education team. She directs the Whole Child Policy Table, working with partners and policymakers to collectively drive systems change aligned with the science of learning and development. She also brings a whole child lens to teacher preparation and development policy through her work on the Teacher Licensure Collaborative and EdPrepLab.

Beth Geiger, Region 16 Comprehensive Center, WA State Director

Beth Geiger is the WA State Director for the Region 16 Comprehensive Center. In this position, she works closely with WA's Office of Native Education on local and statewide programs, emphasizing community-directed work, through close collaboration with R16's WA Tribal Advisory Board. After several years with Washington State's Professional Educator Standards Board. Beth comes to this position, where she served as Associate Director for Educator Pathways and Workforce Development.

Before moving to Washington, Beth worked at Seventh Generation Fund for Native Peoples in Northern California, where she served as the research and strategic assistant to the organization's President. She is originally from Southeast Alaska and has a history of critical research on social and environmental justice issues tied to her home state, including her master's degree work examining sociopolitical barriers to Tlingit language revitalization and the repercussions of Alaska's education system for Alaska Native students. She holds a master's degree in social science from Humboldt State University and a bachelor's in environmental studies from the University of Alaska Southeast.

Christina F. Goodson, M.A., Jiwere-Nut'achi/Baxoje (Otoe-Missouria/Iowa), Tribal Education Specialist

Christina grew up in Manhattan, KS, and Stillwater, OK. She is a member of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe (Faw Faw family) and a descendant of the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma (Dupee family). She currently resides in Oklahoma, her favorite home. Christina graduated from Dartmouth College in 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts in Native American Studies and History and from the University of Oklahoma in 2019 with a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistic Anthropology. Christina has experience working in Native education at the federal, local, and tribal levels and the non-profit/advocacy space. Christina previously worked with the National Indian Education Association as a policy intern and program assistant. Christina comes to NIEA from the classroom as a 7-12 grade educator in her tribal community of Red Rock, OK, teaching Otoe-Missouria language, Native American Studies, and Native Life Skills.

In her role at NIEA, Christina will focus on language and culture programming, identify and support communities to develop language and culture programs, and enhance language and culture resources for educators.

Daphne Littlebear, Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, and Shawnee, NIEA Research and Evaluation Manager

As the Research and Evaluation Manager, Daphne will lead the expansion of NIEA's research and evaluation programming. In collaboration with NIEA's leadership, Board of Directors, and stakeholders, Daphne will focus on developing NIEA's education resource center, which will offer research-based education resources for educators, community members, and students. Daphne has worked in Native education for over thirteen years with tribal education departments, school districts, state government, and non-profit organizations. Most recently, Daphne served as the Deputy Director of Research with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium and an Education Administrator with the NM Public Education Department. Daphne holds a BA and MPA from the University of New Mexico. Daphne is completing her doctoral degree at Arizona State University, studying social justice education, education policy, and Native education. She advocates for Native educational sovereignty and aspires to practice reciprocity to the lands, waters, and future generations.

Melanie Johnson, Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma, NIEA Director, Whole Child Initiative

Melanie Johnson is Director of the Whole Child Initiative, a new department within the National Indian Education Association that will focus on social, health, behavioral, and environmental areas for native students. Melanie joined NIEA as the Program Director in 2019, bringing her passion to create a framework supporting collaboration, engagement, creativity, and innovation promoting empowerment, resiliency, and educational sovereignty.

In addition, Melanie has been a strong advocate and an active participant, working to reduce the effects of underage drinking, non-medical use of prescription drugs, and suicide in American Indian communities for almost a decade. Melanie is a mentor for AI/AN Behavioral Health Professionals National American Indian & Alaska Native TTCs, sits on the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America's Native Peoples Advisory Council, and is a member of the Opioid Response Network Native Communities Workgroup.

Melanie holds an M.Ed. from the University of Oklahoma and is a substance abuse Certified Prevention Specialist (CPS).



Shanise Ka'aikala, Native Hawaiian, NIEA Legislative Analyst

As the Legislative Analyst, Shanise supports NIEA's legislative team by providing research, policy analysis, and promotion of Native Education initiatives at the federal level. Shanise brings three years of Capitol Hill experience in both the U.S Senate and House of Representatives, where she handled energy, water, and issues impacting Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives, and Native Americans. Shanise earned her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Hawai'i in Hilo.

Christine Mason, Executive Director, Center for Educational Improvement

Chris is an educational psychologist and CEI's Founder and Executive Director. Chris is a nationally recognized expert and frequent speaker on student trauma, mindfulness, children's mental health, peer supports, listening to youth, furthering equity, and implementing mindfulness, yoga, and meditation in schools. She is also an assistant clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University's School of Medicine for the Program for Community Health and Recovery and a co-host of the podcast series Cultivating Resilience: A Whole Community Approach for Alleviating Trauma in Schools. She is an IKYTA-certified yoga instructor with 21 years of experience teaching weekly yoga, meditation, and mindfulness classes, and she is also a certified radiant child yoga instructor.

In 2016, she received a "Pioneer in Children's Well-being" award from the Robert Wood Johnson and Ashoka Foundations. Recently, the California State Legislature recognized her contributions to a mindfulness-based approach to school safety and active shooter drills.

In October 2022, Chris became the Co-Principal Investigator of the Compassionate School Leadership Academy (CSLA) through an award from the US Department of Education. That initiative, conducted with colleagues from Yale University, focuses on preparing school leaders in high-need districts to be culturally responsive and proactive in implementing trauma-conscious practices in schools.

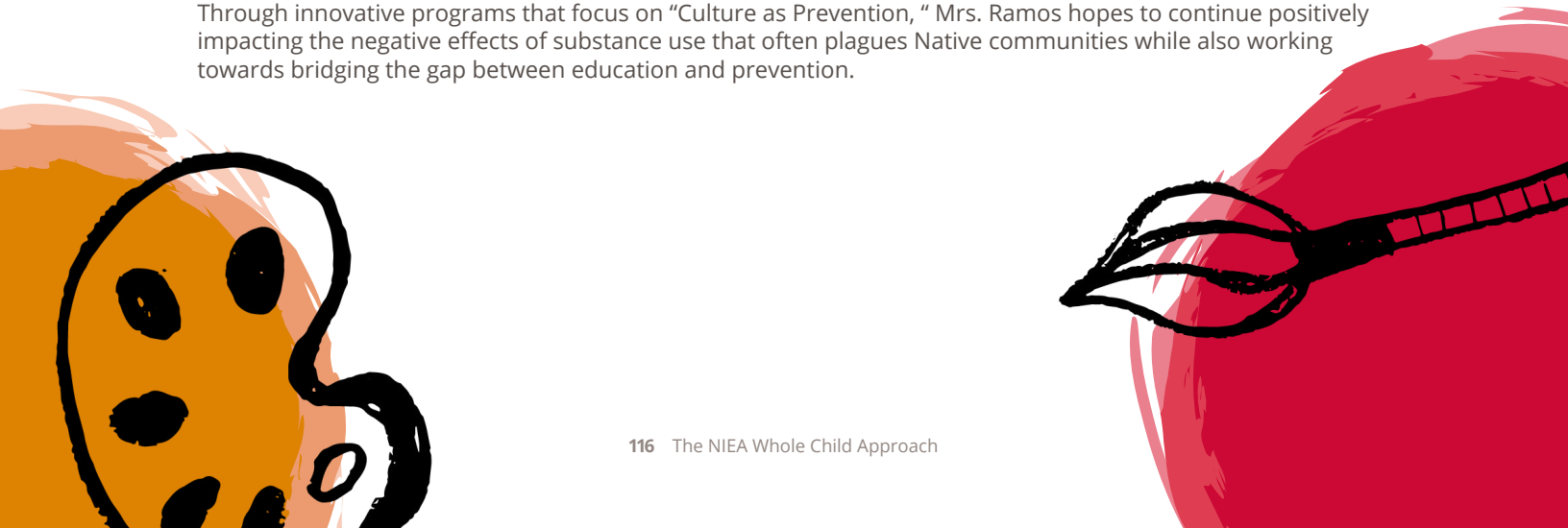
Raquel Ramos, Comanche Nation, NIEA Prevention Specialist for the Whole Child Initiative

Mrs. Raquel Ramos, a member of the Comanche Nation as well as the great-great-granddaughter of Quanah Parker, the last chief of the Comanche, is the Prevention Specialist for the Whole Child Initiative, a new department within the National Indian Education Association.

Mrs. Ramos has worked with tribal communities and Native youth in Prevention for almost a decade. She co-founded the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) Native People's Advisory Council (IPAC) and sits on the Steering Committee.

Through Raquel's prevention work in Native communities, she received the 2019 "Preventionist of the Year" award at the Heartland Alcohol Substance Abuse Conference, the 2017 "National Exemplary Award for Innovative Substance Abuse Prevention Programs, Practices, and Policies" in partnership with the Southern Plains Tribal Health Board, and the 2015 Oklahoma Drug and Alcohol Professional Counselors Association (ODAPCA) "Prevention Program of the Year Award."

Through innovative programs that focus on "Culture as Prevention," Mrs. Ramos hopes to continue positively impacting the negative effects of substance use that often plagues Native communities while also working towards bridging the gap between education and prevention.



Kevin Simmons, Ph.D. Student, University of Oregon

An enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and a descendant of the Muckleshoot tribe of Washington. He currently serves in the fields of child welfare, teacher preparation, and Alaskan Indian Indian American youth mental health. Kevin advocates for programs, services, and communities that strengthen tribal families through culturally based services and interventions. He is a fourth year Ph.D. student at the University of Oregon with research interests in culturally based pedagogy, adaptations of evidence-based practices, and utilizing culture and culturally responsive practices to impact western-based outcomes for American Indian/Alaska Native youth, people, families, and communities. As a father of 8 children, Kevin believes his greatest achievements are centered on family (tilixam) life.

Kevin's work includes student success, engagement, and outcomes with American Indian and Alaska Native populations. He has worked with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB), the National American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC), and the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS). He has presented his research and work in several fields and settings, including child welfare, public health, education, international Native forums, and various tribal governments and entities. Kevin's work includes the development of systems & practices, curriculums, and professional development opportunities that center the lived experiences and knowledge of Native people and lifeways: Culture as Intervention™ and the Native American Family Engagement Model (NAFAM)™ provide service delivery systems with culturally informed and Native based practices to serve tribal people, families, and communities.

Acknowledgments

Lyla June Johnston, Diné (Navajo), Tsétséhestâhese (Cheyenne), Poet, Singer-Songwriter, Hip-hop Artist, Human Ecologist, Public Speaker, and Community Organizer

Dr. Lyla June Johnston (aka Lyla June) is a poet, singer-songwriter, hip-hop artist, human ecologist, public speaker, and community organizer of Diné (Navajo), Tsétséhestâhese (Cheyenne) and European lineages. Her multi-genre presentation style has engaged audiences across the globe toward personal, collective, and ecological healing. Her messages focus on Native issues and solutions, supporting youth, inter-cultural healing, historical trauma, and traditional land stewardship practices. She blends her study of Human Ecology at Stanford, graduate work in Native Pedagogy, and the traditional worldview she grew up with to inform her music, perspectives, and solutions. Her doctoral research focused on how pre-colonial Native Nations shaped large regions of Turtle Island (aka the Americas) to produce abundant food systems for humans and non-humans. Her internationally acclaimed live performances are conveyed through the medium of speech, hip-hop, poetry, and acoustic music. Her goal is to grow closer to the Creator by learning to love deeper.

Holly Echo-Hawk, member of the Pawnee Nation

Holly Echo-Hawk has spent decades working in the field of behavioral health and has been honored to use her experience to assist Native communities develop services to support the innate capacity of Indigenous people. She is a tribal behavioral health subject matter expert and serves as a board member of the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership. She is also a member of the Wharerātā Group, an international network of Indigenous behavioral health experts. She is a host of a Webinar series produced by the Region 1 Mental Health Technology Transfer Center on Native Psychological Brilliance.

Listening Session Facilitators

National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

Caitlin Dawkins, Director, Justice Programs, National Institute for Work and Learning, FHI 360

Christina Goodson, Tribal Education Specialist

Melanie Johnson, Director, Whole Child Initiative

Raquel Ramos, Prevention Specialist for the Whole Child Initiative

Stephanie Hawk, Tribal State Policy Associate

Shanise Ka'aikala, Legislative Analyst

Francis Vigil, Tribal Education Specialist

Dr. Casie Wise, Senior Program Director

Center for Educational Improvement (CEI)

Margaret Bass, Communications Assistant

Whitney Becker, Research Assistant

Leah Bullinger, Research Assistant

Jillayne Flanders, Deputy Director

Martha Staeheli, Researcher

Orinthia Harris, Faculty/Equity Diversity Consultant

Apoorva Vallampati, S-CCATE Manager

Hallie Williams, Research Assistant

Qualitative Data Analysis, Report Development, and Review

Our thanks to the following CEI staff who assisted with the data recording and analysis and report development: Hallie Williams, Martha Staeheli, Meghan Wenzel, Alison Sumski, Viviana McKenney, Chandni Lai, Hannah Puttre, Whitney Becker, Orinthia Harris, Leah Bullinger, and Margaret Bass..

Our thanks to the following individuals who read and responded to early drafts of this report, and assisted developing the logic for the organization and elaboration of topics within the report: Francis Vigil and Juliet Jones.



Appendix A

Questions from listening sessions

Session 1

Round 1:

- What strengths of Native students and communities can we turn to and build on as we improve Native education? What are the barriers and challenges?

Round 2:

- What are some of the features of Native Brilliance?
- What strategies can support Native Brilliance?
- How can we explore and magnify strengths in different age groups?

Session 2



Note: The guiding prompts and questions acted merely as guides for the facilitators and not all questions were asked in each breakout room.

Round 1:

- Discuss at your table the top 3 stressful and/or traumatic experiences in your life
- How did you/are you coping with these experiences?
- How could the Factor for your room (Prevention, Supports, Building Resiliency, or Developing Protective Factors) help produce a positive outcome for the case study?
- Again, imagine a good solution or resolution—imagine without barriers—under the best circumstances, what could happen?
- Then taking the “Prevention/Supports/Building Resiliency/Developing Protective Factors approach, what could be done?

Round 2:

- Which policies do you believe should be priorities? Why?
- When you consider your communities, how might these policy changes make an important difference?
- What can be done to ensure access?
- Are some of these policies being addressed in your states or communities? If so, how?
- Could some of the topics from our first session (Native Brilliance, Ancestral Pedagogy, a strengths-based approach, Coalition Building) strengthen policy?
 - What is the extent of the problems these policies are addressing?
 - Who should collaborate in developing solutions?
- Who are allies of NIEA who could be involved?
- Is there a need for research? If so, what research do you recommend?
- Who could help fund these concerns?
- Any final thoughts?



Session 3

Note: Due to the various areas of facilitator expertise, the guiding questions were divided as follows and participants chose their breakout room based on their interests.

Breakout Rooms Session #1: Drilling Down

Overall Satisfaction with Native Education

Teacher Quality

- Teacher preparation?
- % of teachers who are Native
- Class size
- What happens with students in urban and suburban environments versus BIE schools?

Curriculum and Materials

- Relevance?
- Instruction in Native Language/culture
- Accurate teaching of history (genocide, broken treaties)
- Are materials up to date?

Resources? Technology?

- Adequate funding
- Administration, Community, and Supports
- Quality – Effectiveness of Principals, Superintendents?
- Adequate training and availability of counselors
- Listening to and involving families

Outcomes for youth

- Dropout rates
- % who go onto college/ complete college
- Jobs/ future

Recommendations?



Trauma and Wraparound Supports

We would like 3-4 people to speak about trauma that they believe needs to be recorded for our report.

- Is this historical or current/ongoing trauma?
- How does trauma impact the lives of youth? (substance and alcohol use, suspensions and expulsions from school, arrests, self-esteem, intergenerational problems)
- How effective are the solutions? What solutions come from Native practices?
- What factors must come together to be most effective?
- What is most urgent?

Native Brilliance, Cultural Traditions, and Native Language

Let's reflect in this session on the strengths of Native people that we can turn to strengthen education. We are looking for concrete examples that are impactful.

Is your tribe/community incorporating Native language in schools? How? Anything that is working well? We would like a record of tribes and languages.

As you speak, please tell us where the programs are being implemented, with what age levels, by whom. Consider also the funding source, whether there is university or research involvement? Lead professors?

Prompts: Consider research on Native language, embedding cultural traditions, effective programs for prevention and treatment of alcohol and substance use.

- Why is the program working?
- Who is involved?
- How are tribal leaders and elders involved?
- Is it being used elsewhere?
- What else could be done?



Recent and Current Research

We are interested in recording information related to current research that is funded by federal, state, and private initiatives. We want to gain information to help us understand examples of work to be replicated, how the programs are being implemented and with whom.

- This will help us understand what we can advocate for future research.
- Where is the program being implemented?
- What are the hubs for Native research with Native investigators?
- Where are the doctorate programs?
- Where are the technical assistance centers?
- Target population?
- What features are unique to Native ways of researching? How can these be embedded in what we do?
- Size of the project? Amount of funding, number of years?
- Findings to date?
- How is information being disseminated?
- What are the barriers and strategies to be more impactful?



Breakout Rooms Session #2: Recommendations for Policy, Research Funding, and Guidance for Allies

Policy

- Assume for a moment that NIEA is successful in getting support for its proposed and current policies. What are the implications?
- What could happen over the next 5-10 years with success?
- What other policies are needed?
- When policies are successful, what is included in the components (who, what, when, where, why, how)
- How can NIEA and local tribes leverage effective policies?
- What are potential threats and barriers? What can be done to minimize these?

[Facilitator highlights components of NIEA policies]

- Child Welfare and Foster Placements – keeping families and communities together
- Native Youth in Juvenile Justice Systems - factors poverty, alcohol, drug use, suicide, exposure to violence – complications for Native youth related to jurisdiction. What is available for support and treatment?
- Culturally Relevant Social Emotional Learning (Native language, traditions). Integrated services for mental health and community and school-based health.
- Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy Act to record and archive experiences and ensure culturally appropriate supports for students in BIE-funded and public schools]
- Other

Coalition Building – Guidance for Allies (Please modify slightly as needed for Education or Prevention)

- What are examples of effective collaborations for NIEA? For local tribes?
- Try to be specific- where, who, for what?
- What barriers exist?
- How could allies be more effective?
 - What guidelines/protocol might NIEA use with allies?
 - How can we move forward in a way that honors Native people and avoids missteps?
- Are participants interested in joining with CEI and our Coalition for the Future or building your own Coalition? CEI is honored to collaborate in either way.

NIEA Session 3: Breakout Room Questions

Breakout Rooms Session #1: Drilling Down

Overall Satisfaction with Native Education

Teacher Quality

- Teacher preparation?
- % of teachers who are Native
- Class size
- What happens with students in urban and suburban environments versus BIE schools?

Curriculum and Materials

- Relevance?
- Instruction in Native Language/culture
- Accurate teaching of history (genocide, broken treaties)
- Are materials up to date?
- Resources? Technology?
- Adequate funding

Administration, Community, and Supports

- Quality – Effectiveness of Principals, Superintendents?
- Adequate training and availability of counselors
- Listening to and involving families

Outcomes for youth

- Dropout rates
- % who go onto college/ complete college
- Jobs/ future

Recommendations?



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- Where are the technical assistance centers?
- Target population?
- What features are unique to Native ways of researching? How can these be embedded in what we do?
- Size of the project? Amount of funding, number of years?
- Findings to date?
- How is information being disseminated?
- What are the barriers and strategies to be more impactful?

Breakout Rooms Round #3: Recommendations for Policy, Research Funding, and Guidance for Allies

- a. Room #1- Shanise and Jill - Policy
- b. Room#2- Stephanie and Chris – Policy

(Rooms 1 and 2 may be combined)

- c. Room #3 Melanie and Martha – Coalitions/Allies- Education
- d. Room #4 - Raquel and Whitney – Coalition/Allies - Prevention



Policy

- Assume for a moment that NIEA is successful in getting support for its proposed and current policies. What are the implications?
- What could happen over the next 5-10 years with success?
- What other policies are needed?
- When policies are successful, what is included in the components (who, what, when, where, why, how)
- How can NIEA and local tribes leverage effective policies?
- What are potential threats and barriers? What can be done to minimize these?

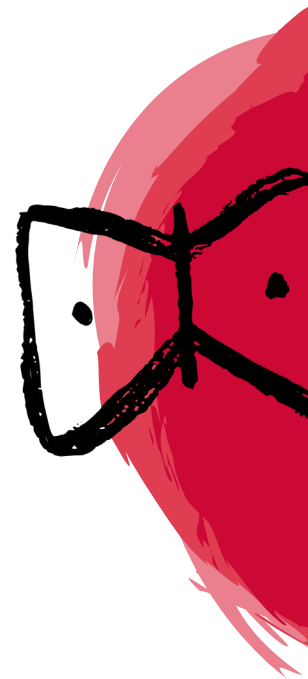
[Facilitator highlights components of NIEA policies]

- Child Welfare and Foster Placements – keeping families and communities together
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Coalition Building – Guidance for Allies

- What are examples of effective collaborations for NIEA? For local tribes?
- Try to be specific- where, who, for what?
- What barriers exist?
- How could allies be more effective?
- What guidelines/protocol might NIEA for allies?
- How can we move forward in a way that honors Native people and avoids missteps?

Are participants interested in joining with CEI and our Coalition for the Future or building your own Coalition? CEI is honored to collaborate in either way.



Appendix B

List of Participating Tribes

Total Count: 81 tribes, 156 registrants registered as citizens

Dine'/Navajo (22)	Fort Peck-MT (1)
Kiowa (9)	Grand Ronde (1)
Comanche (7)	Ho-Chunk of Winnebago (1)
Oglala Lakota Sioux (6)	Inupiaq (1)
Cherokee (5)	Jemez (1)
Choctaw (4)	Ketchikan Indian Community (1)
Cheyenne and Arapaho (3)	Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe (1)
Muskogee Creek (3)	Lenni Lenape (1)
Potawatomi (3)	Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana (1)
Seminole Nation of Oklahoma (3)	Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe (1)
Seneca Nation of Oklahoma (3)	Makah Tribe (1)
Blackfoot (2)	Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin (1)
Colville (2)	MHA Nation (1)
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (2)	Minnesota Chippewa Tribe - Leech Lake (1)
Kaibab Paiute (2)	Muckleshoot (1)
Klamath (2)	Nakoda (1)
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (2)	Native Village of Perryville (1)
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (2)	Nez Perce (1)
Mohawk (2)	Nome Eskimo Community (1)
Native Hawaiian (2)	Ojibwe (1)
North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians of California (2)	Omaha Nation of Nebraska (1)
Ponca (2)	Oneida (1)
Puyallup Tribe (2)	Osage Nation (1)
QUILEUTE (2)	Otoe-Missouria (1)
Red Lake Nation (2)	Paiute (1)
Sac and Fox Nation (2)	Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma (1)
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (2)	Pomo (1)
Yakama (2)	Pueblo of Santa Ana (1)
Yankton Sioux (2)	Quapaw (1)
Absentee Shawnee (1)	Reno-Sparks Indian Colony (1)
Afognak and Koniag (Alaska) (1)	Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (1)
Alaska Native, Tlingit (1)	San Felipe Pueblo (1)
Apache Tribe of Oklahoma (1)	Spokane Tribe (1)
Bishop Paiute Tribe (1)	Standing Rock (1)
Cheyenne River Lakota Oyate (1)	Taino (1)
Cheyenne River Sioux (1)	The Tulalip (1)
Chippewa-Creek (1)	Tohono O'odham Nation (1)
Crow (Apsaalooke) (1)	Wasco Palouse (1)
Curyung (1)	Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska (1)
Dakelh (1)	Yankton Sioux Tribe (1)
Eastern Shoshone (1)	

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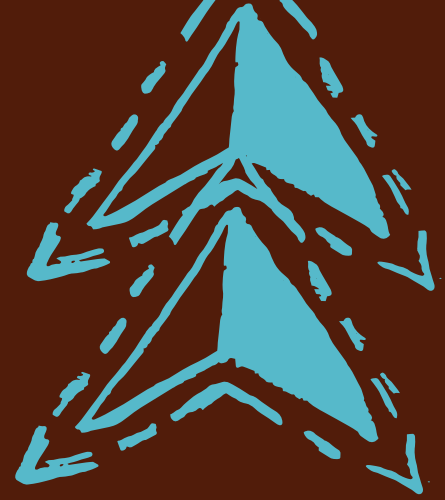
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National Indian Education Association

The Center for Educational Improvement and its Coalition for the Future of Education partnered with NIEA in the research, analysis, and development of the Whole Child Approach.

