



2016 Southwest Pathways Conference Tribal Leaders Pre-Conference

Summary Report

May 2, 2016

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West Comprehensive Center at WestEd



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*Monday, May 2, 2016
7am–1pm
DoubleTree Resort by Hilton
Scottsdale, AZ 85250*

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West Comprehensive Center at WestEd



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Introduction

On May 2, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and the West Comprehensive Center (WCC) at WestEd facilitated a half-day pre-conference for tribal leaders and educators participating in the 2016 Southwest Pathways Conference (which was held May 2–4). The gathering raised awareness about critical education, health, and well-being issues affecting Native American youth and families. Conversations helped participants understand how to better support school and district personnel in improving learning conditions and outcomes for Native American students.

Participants came from six tribal nations, six higher education institutions, eleven school districts, as well as various charter schools, state agencies, and community-based organizations. Speakers represented various organizations, such as the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, Native American Fatherhood and Families Association,

National Congress of American Indians, Arizona Department of Education, Utah State Office of Education, and WestEd.

The day began with networking time followed by an overview of Indian education initiatives in Arizona. Workshop topics encompassed culturally inclusive practices, family engagement, health and well-being, substance abuse prevention, the Every Student Succeeds Act, and dropout prevention. The pre-conference closed with a keynote address by Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas and traditional Native American dances performed by a Hualapai youth group.

This document contains summaries of the plenary sessions and workshops. Each summary includes the title of the session or workshop as it appeared in the conference agenda; the speaker's name, title, and organization; a thesis statement about the session's content; key points; and an abstract of the session or workshop. The document concludes with feedback from participants and potential next steps.

Summary of Pre-Conference Sessions and Workshops

Arizona Kids Can't Wait Initiatives for Indian Education

Speaker: Nadine Groenig, Director of Indian Education, Arizona Department of Education

Thesis: *Partnerships Help Native American Students Succeed*

Key Points:

- The preservation of Native languages and cultures continues to be a primary objective for state and local leaders across the country.
- It is time to rethink efforts to prevent dropout for Native American students and focus on engaging students in meaningful and relevant learning opportunities.
- School attendance across state lines is an emerging issue that must be addressed collectively by the entities involved.
- Groups are convening to collaboratively address improving educational opportunities for Native American students, including the National Forum on Dropout Prevention for Native and Tribal Communities; the ADE's Native American Advisory Council; the WCC's Indian Education Advisory Board; and the Tri-State Alliance of Indian Education Directors in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah.

- Positive stories and results about the education of Arizona's Native American students are flowing in from across the state and region, including rigorous science projects, innovative robotics contests, improvements in reading scores, and higher postsecondary matriculation rates.

Abstract: Across the country, steps are being taken to preserve Native American languages and cultures. For example, curricular guidelines related to preserving Native languages have been developed and implemented in schools that serve American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. Arizona has a culturally inclusive practices committee, as well as an active Native American Advisory Council that informs work of the ADE. ADE is identifying successful native-language preservation programs and holding discussions with faculty from the College of Education at the University of Arizona about including these programs in teacher preparation. Subsequent parallel discussions are planned with faculty at Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University. Other issues demanding attention include school attendance across state lines (i.e., allowing students on reservations to be able to attend the closest school, even if it is in another state) and returning the National Forum on Dropout Prevention for Native and Tribal Communities to Arizona. The ADE supports the education of Native American



students through integrated support teams, grants for students, dual credit through tribal colleges, family engagement, technical assistance, and targeted use of Johnson-O'Malley funds.

Culturally Inclusive Practices Workshop

Speaker: Sharon Nelson-Barber, Senior Program Director, Culture and Language in Education, WestEd

Thesis: *Indigenous Educators Well Positioned to Gather Insights about Beneficial, Community-Specific, Classroom-Level Strategies*

Key Points:

- Parallels exist between Indigenous pedagogy and reform-minded pedagogy.
- Conventional testing formats measure a limited range of students' knowledge.
- Cultural trauma continues to affect Indigenous systems, communities, and individuals.
- Adaptation to local and cultural contexts should be a primary consideration when applying research-based innovations and practices in education.
- There are numerous guidance resources that help educators incorporate culturally inclusive practices, such as the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and proceedings from the School Environment Listening Sessions.

Abstract: This session covered key considerations for implementing culturally inclusive practices in the classroom. While similarities between Indigenous and mainstream cultures exist, there are often mismatches between different cultures with regard to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. However, there are parallel aspects of Indigenous pedagogy and current reform-minded pedagogies, and these commonalities should be articulated to educators. While assessment paradigms typically capture only a fraction of what students actually know, assessments should ideally be culturally inclusive enough to allow all students to reveal what they know, regardless of how well their cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and community languages fit with the test developers' assumptions. In addition, when considering culturally responsive education, it is important to understand that effects of cultural trauma linger. Current issues facing Indigenous peoples may be traced to punishment for heritage language use, forced separation from ancestral homelands and land-based practice, abuse in boarding schools, and other ill-treatment. To respond to these challenges and the need for culturally responsive education practices, an "Ecology of Indigenous Learner Support" was developed. This best-practices framework was created by looking inside the education system for answers and extrapolating classroom-level strategies that will be beneficial in Indigenous community contexts. Cultural identity for self-determination is fundamental to the framework. Additionally, efforts to develop and implement culturally responsive education practices can be informed by



projects by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, recommendations to the field from a study of the Common Core State Standards, and strategies that emerged from the School Environment Listening Sessions.

Family Engagement Workshop

Speaker: Albert Pooley, President, Native American Fatherhood and Families Association

Thesis: *Parents Have a Sacred Responsibility to Instill in Their Children a Passion for Lifelong Learning*

Key Points:

- Learning must be a family priority. Parents have a sacred responsibility to support and pass on learning, and inspire their children's desire to learn.
- Fear, loneliness, chaos, and low self-worth can prevent learning. Parents must help students develop strategies to combat these barriers to learning.
- Primary learning avenues include study, instruction, and experience. Parents can assist children in learning through experience.
- Learning is continuous throughout life.
- To thrive, parents and children must be welcomed, wanted, and needed.

Abstract: Drawing from his background as a marriage and family therapist, member of the National Board of Alcohol Use and Abuse, and trainer for the Native American Fatherhood and Families Association, Albert Pooley explained the role that parents and families play in education. He discussed

the power of loving the people one serves, whether through education, within a family, or as a therapist. Parents, especially, have a sacred responsibility to motivate youth to learn and instill the value of education in their children. When children are empowered to learn, they use educational experiences to mature, and rise above oppressive forces. Four factors that may prevent children from learning include fear, loneliness, chaos, and low self-worth. However, every child has unique abilities and talents, and when parents have confidence in and support these capabilities, children learn and are better able to combat these barriers. Children learn through study, instruction (for example, parents and grandparents help children make fry bread), and experience. Parents play a unique role in bolstering their children's learning throughout life by facilitating experiences that combat fear, loneliness, chaos, and low self-worth. Finally, parents and children need to know they are welcomed, wanted, and needed if they are to thrive. These needs apply to life at home, in the community, and within the education system. In summary, parents have a sacred responsibility to inspire and motivate children to learn and grow for a lifetime.

Health and Well-Being Workshop

Speaker: Malia Villegas, Director, Policy Research Center, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)

Thesis: *Change the Narrative to Emphasize Strengths, Clarify Weaknesses, and Improve Educational Outcomes*

Key Points:

- Expanded storylines communicate that Indigenous groups are far more nuanced than what may be indicated by data on graduation rates, obesity, diabetes, substance use, and/or suicide.
- A more accurate story emerges by pushing beyond the narrative of poverty and viewing existing data through four thematic lenses: family economic capability, access to opportunity, child health and wellness, and system involvement.
- We must improve access to data and use data to tell new stories.
- The health disparity bar has not moved in 50 years — we should seek a balance between triage and empowerment.
- Frontline workers helping Native American youth need to understand indicators of behavioral and health issues. Coordinated and efficient service-referral mechanisms that respond to individual needs are essential.

Abstract: The health of children and their families impacts education outcomes. To improve outcomes, we must change the language used to describe challenges and issues. First, narratives and storylines are important. For example, framing a discussion around food insecurity is more meaningful than merely presenting obesity and diabetes rates. We can reframe the dropout discussion by asking instead where kids are going. By examining the same problem through a different lens, we change the conversation to emphasize strengths and identify root causes. Second, data are powerful and access

to data must improve. A new report from NCAI focuses on Indigenous populations of four states — Alaska, Montana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma — through the lenses of family economic capability, access to opportunity, child health and wellness, and system involvement. The report provides information about state-level differences between Native and non-Native populations. Third, intersections and priorities across data sets should be determined at state and local levels. The workshop closed with a group conversation focused on two questions: What are the predominant narratives regarding the health and wellness of the Native American youth and families that you serve? What are the most important intersections between health and education?

Tribal Education Directors Panel

Moderator: Maryah Gowan, Student, Kayenta Unified School District

Panelists: Lenny Dempsey, Education Supervisor, Pascua Yaqui Tribe; Dr. Florinda Jackson, Director, Department of Diné Education; Isaac Salcido, Education Department Director, Gila River Indian Community

Thesis: *Solutions Are Needed to Address Numerous Challenges*

Key Points:

- Help develop the capacity of tribal education departments to engage community members in problem solving.
- Revitalize and preserve Indigenous cultures and languages.



- Establish relationships among school districts, state agencies, and tribes to better meet student needs.
- Advocate for multiple measures and means of assessing students' knowledge and skills.
- Ensure access to current data and informational resources.

Abstract: Student moderator Maryah Gowan posed four questions to the panel of tribal education directors: (1) Does your tribe have a Native American language program? (2) How do you collaborate with school district and charter school personnel on your land to ensure students receive a good education? (3) What is the biggest challenge facing your education department? (4) What assistance do you need? Panelists described the language programs they offer and efforts to increase student participation. Partnerships and collaborative efforts are limited — tribal education directors could use assistance in developing model partnerships around critical issues. Challenges include ensuring that students enter school ready to learn by increasing access to early childhood education; administrative turnover and the need for principal academies that develop instructional leaders; recruitment and retention of good teachers who understand the Common Core State Standards and how to integrate them with cultural standards; and the need for consistent and reliable resources at each site. Tribal education directors could use help to improve learning environments and school climates; address social and emotional learning needs of students; and recruit more Native Americans to serve as school board members, principals, and teachers.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Panel

Panelists: Denise Estudillo, Federal Programs Director, Winslow Unified School District; Nancy Konitzer, Deputy Associate Superintendent, Title I, Arizona Department of Education; William Mendoza, Executive Director, White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education; Isaac Salcido, Education Department Director, Gila River Indian Community

Thesis: *Reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act Offers Incentives and Encourages Stakeholder Involvement*

Key Points:

- The ESSA operates on the premise that change can be affected through incentives and regulations. The goal of the ESSA is to inform the education improvement process through dialogue with stakeholders as the implementation of ESSA unfolds.
- Rulemaking is underway, so it is important to engage stakeholders in the process.
- The present administration's emphasis on Native American youth and education needs to live on with the next administration.
- Consultations with tribes are now required under specified circumstances, and more guidance is needed regarding how these take place.
- Submit feedback, questions, and concerns now to the U.S. Department of Education to inform rulemaking.

Abstract: On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was



signed into law. This law was 12 years in the making, and contains important provisions related to high academic standards, college and career readiness, high-quality preschool experiences, student supports, and school improvement. The law reduces the testing burden, encourages local innovation, and maintains dedicated funding for vulnerable students. In addition, the new law does not require educator evaluation systems. Federal Rulemaking — the process that turns law into reality — is underway. Now is a critical time to provide feedback and request changes to the ESSA. For example, concerns about state accountability systems and how federal funds can follow students to private schools should be submitted. SEA consultations with tribes are a major feature of the law. These consultations have been encouraged in the past, and are now required under specific circumstances. Consultations are being done in a variety of ways and further guidance is needed. For example, it is difficult to conduct a consultation with just one tribe. Some SEAs use teams that collaborate with tribes on Title programs. The use of parent liaisons, parent surveys, and needs assessments required by law are being utilized to inform these tribal consultations in states.

Additional Information: The U.S. Department of Education-sponsored website, <http://edtribalconsultations.org/>, has archived summaries of tribal consultations and listening sessions. Recent entries include summaries of sessions held in spring 2016 in Lake Buena Vista, Florida; Sisseton, South Dakota; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Dropout Prevention Workshop

Speaker: Lillian Tsosie-Jensen, School Counseling, Equity, Prevention Coordinator, Utah State Office of Education (Student Advocacy Services)

Thesis: *Heal Ourselves and Heal Our Children*

Key Points:

- Indigenous students live in two worlds. Educators need to help them understand where they fit in and support identity development to decrease dropout rates.
- Indigenous people tend to be global/holistic learners as opposed to analytic/sequential learners, so educators must look beyond academic performance (e.g., grades, course failures, test scores) and behaviors (e.g., attendance, suspensions) to what happens outside the classroom.
- Native American students may struggle in schools that are not culturally sensitive. Students must feel connected to school and community to do well.
- Chronic trauma can change people's genetics, and we all are byproducts of our genetics.
- Students succeed in trauma-informed schools where educators explore why behaviors happen.

Abstract: The workshop began with a review of dropout statistics, acknowledgement that Indigenous students experience high dropout rates, and discussion of contributing factors. Native American students may find little meaning

and relevance at school. They may not understand why they are required to study certain topics, feel disconnected and not validated as individuals, and experience a lack of cultural awareness. To clarify the dropout problem, educators need to understand what is going on in students' psyches. The speaker indicated that we are all a product of our genetics and chronic trauma changes genetics. Indigenous populations continue to carry and be affected by ancestral trauma. The trauma resides in our DNA, so we must learn to heal ourselves and our children. To succeed, students need trauma-informed educators and schools that seek to understand why behaviors happen rather than simply assigning punishments. Recent work examines trauma from a holistic lens aligned with Indigenous teachings.

Substance Abuse Prevention Workshop

Speaker: Christine Thompson, Women's Services Counselor, Native Health

Thesis: *The Healing Way: Breaking the Cycle of Substance Abuse in Indian Country*

Key Points:

- Parents who experience trauma often have a harder time caring for their children.
- Native Americans have experienced historical trauma and intergenerational grief.
- Healing occurs when an individual is restored to harmony and reconnected with the natural way of life.

- Healing practices and techniques vary among tribes.
- When professionals work with specialized populations, they gain understanding by focusing on physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental components.

Abstract: Christine Thompson described some of the many challenges that exist in Indian Country, such as historical trauma, substance abuse, sexual assault, and alcohol abuse. Parents suffering from these issues may have a difficult time caring for their children. In turn, Native American students may face similar challenges and experience higher dropout rates. To break the cycle and deploy a blanket of healing to Native American populations, it is essential to consider both current and historical experience. Historical trauma is defined as an event or set of events perpetrated on a group of people who share a specific group identity. Native Americans have experienced historical trauma through avenues such as forced boarding schools and genocide. Furthermore, domestic violence and the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs are prevalent in Native American societies. Healing occurs when an individual is restored to harmony and reconnected with the natural way of life. Healing practices and techniques vary among tribes. Common practices include sweat lodges, talking circles, ceremonial smoking of tobacco, herbalism, and maturity or vision quests. Strategies for counselors and educators include using tribal websites, addressing the variety of religions in a community, including humor and teasing in work with clients and students, giving gifts, and respecting the land.

Resources

The President’s Generation Indigenous (Gen I) initiative seeks to break the cycle of challenges in Indian Country through what is known as “IDENTITY”: identify, diversity, empowered, native, traditions, Indigenous, tribes, youth.

Video: Indian Boarding School Abuse
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1tiQB8gt5g>

Video: To the Indigenous Woman — A Poem by the 1491s (short version) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fxP95eu8Xs>

Video: Rebel Music | Generation Indigenous Rising (Gen-I) | MTV <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4rsD7iXHAw>

Website: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/nativeamericans/generation-indigenous>

Website: <http://indianlaw.org/>

Keynote Address

The pre-conference closed with keynote remarks from Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas. Superintendent Douglas expressed her desire for this event to become an annual tradition. She discussed the listening tour conducted across the state, and highlighted strategies that ADE is using to improve learning opportunities for Native American students. She described initiatives focused on the preservation of Native American languages and cultures as well as the purpose of the Culturally Inclusive Practices Committee. The need to expand the Indian Education Office was also identified, as was expansion of school choice options. Specifically, she referenced empowerment scholarships and the Native American Education Opportunity Act, introduced by U.S. Senator John McCain, which offers tailored education options to Native American students living on Indian reservations.



Conclusion

Prior to the event, registered attendees were asked how knowledgeable they were about the topics to be addressed during the conference, and to rate the priority level of each topic. Registrants indicated they were most knowledgeable about health and well-being (40% indicated *very knowledgeable*), and least knowledgeable about ESSA (47% indicated *little knowledge*). The top two priorities were culturally inclusive practices (80%) and family engagement (73%). When asked what their biggest questions or concerns were about the Native American education in the Southwest, comments included concerns and questions about how ESSA impacts Indian Education, the need to address ways in which American Indian students become college ready, and student access to postsecondary opportunities.

Following the event, attendees were surveyed a second time to assess the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the conference. Participants rated the overall quality of the conference as either *excellent* (57%) or *good* (43%). A majority of participants (71%) indicated that the relevance of the information provided was *excellent*. When asked to rate the usefulness of the information provided, 64% indicated that it was *excellent* and the other 36% indicated that it was *good*. Post-survey comments suggest that participants want to explore additional approaches for achieving college and career readiness, such as high-quality career and technical education courses and

pathways. Attendees also appreciated the ability to network with other Native American leaders and educators, and want more time to delve deeply into critical issues, converse with and learn from colleagues, and problem solve with peers and experts.

The Native American Team, comprised of pre-conference participants, reunited after the Southwest Pathways Conference to reflect upon both events and discuss potential next steps. Participants commented that the events provided opportunities to break down silos and create new connections among workforce development initiatives, employers, educators, and job-seekers in Native American communities. Specifically, they discussed holding regular meetings and calls to strengthen connections across tribal communities. They suggested developing a centralized website, built by team members from various institutions, to house high-quality resources with the goal of supporting one another and the surrounding communities. Additionally, they elaborated on the idea of holding a strategic planning meeting with key stakeholders to envision the desired future, articulate shared goals, and agree upon action steps for moving forward. Team members also wish to review the Arizona State Team Call to Action and collaborate to achieve common objectives. Finally, they discussed the possibility of holding a separate meeting on the topic of workforce development for Native American populations.

