Native Education Collaborative

Making Native Education Our Shared Priority

Promising Programs and Practices

CCNETWORK National Center

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The National Comprehensive Center

The National Comprehensive Center (NCC) is one of 20 technical assistance centers supported under the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers program from 2019 to 2024. The NCC focuses on helping the 19 Regional Comprehensive Centers and state, regional, and local education agencies throughout the country to meet the daunting challenge of improving student performance with equitable resources.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The National Center assembled a panel of experts in the field of American Indian and Alaska Native education from a broad constituency base to help determine current needs and interests in the field. Interviews conducted with the panel produced the following primary thematic categories:


Native culture and language


College and career readiness and access


Tribal consultation and sovereignty


Physical and behavioral health


Teachers and leaders


Promising programs and practices

The National Center's American Indian and Alaska Native Education Project developed the following briefs for each category to positively impact the learning lives of Native children and youth. These briefs are meant to enhance the effectiveness of state education agencies' work on Native education. Though tribal communities are very diverse, for the purposes of these briefs, the terms *American Indian and Alaska Native, Native, indigenous,* and *tribal* are used to refer to Native communities.

Promising Programs and Practices

Over the years, we have learned the importance of recognizing the strengths and expertise of states to focus on the resourcefulness, resilience, and expertise in Native education. Everyone has something to contribute, and everyone is continuing to learn how to create school environments where Native students thrive. This brief provides contextual information and descriptions of select programs and practices serving Native students, regarding state identification and support, representation of Native student interest, and locally created examples.

States follow their own procedures to guide their education departments, districts, and schools in considering whether to adopt a program or practice based on the evidence behind it. However, states need to remember certain factors when seeking promising programs and practices for Native students. In the field of Native education, promising programs and practices are likely to be born locally, sometimes sponsored by tribes alone or in conjunction with local schools and communities. As such, they may require modification to achieve similar results for other communities since they are specific to the local community, as well as support to make these changes.

A *program* is a set of practices, processes, and procedures with a coherent purpose and specified result. A *practice* is a way of doing something that is commonly employed in particular situations. Educators

may be very familiar with the idea of evidence-based programs and practices and the four levels of validation used to rate a program or practice's effectiveness, depending upon the sophistication of the evaluation design and results. Promising programs and practices are labelled as *promising* because they have not been rigorously evaluated, but they demonstrate a benefit to a local population (e.g., a school, district, or community). They may lack rigorous evaluation because they were not designed in a way that enables credible evaluation, were not resourced to be evaluated, or need further development.

State Identification and Support of Successful Local Programs and Practices

Tippeconnic and Faircloth (2006) express encouragement in knowing that "more American Indians and Alaska Natives [AI/AN] are conducting research and adding their voice to the discussion" (p. 29). Tippeconnic and Faircloth (2006) explain that, historically, there have been efforts to improve the quality of education and its relevancy to the needs of Native students in public school systems and in schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). These reform efforts continue today and have gained momentum as Native control of education strengthens.

Tippeconnic and Faircloth (2006) share that Native researchers can inspire states to support more local innovation and help states develop this work. Once a state identifies a promising program and practice, it can provide a ladder of support to develop, evaluate, and disseminate information about the program or practice and assist other locations in adopting and contextualizing it. Additionally, states can establish incentives and supports to create local programs and innovative practices for Native students and help establish evaluation criteria. The authors add that the resulting programs and practices will "be cognizant of and responsive to the unique linguistic, culture, and social characteristics of AI/AN [American Indian and Alaska Native] students" (p. 29). Further, evaluation will also be essential to ensure effective programming for Native students. To encourage and facilitate the development of effective programs, a state can provide the following evaluation services:

- develop provider guidelines for evaluating Native programs,
- offer evaluation services through a state university,
- sponsor evaluation and research by Native educators and researchers, and
- publish the evaluation studies of Native programs.

Representation of Native Students' Interests in Program Design and Adoption

When states develop or adopt programs, they recommend (and sometimes require) the use of specific practices in many areas of education, across state education agencies, and in other state agencies that impact local schools. When a state is developing or considering these programs for adoption, it establishes policies and procedures that ensure Native students' interests and needs are represented. In some cases, the state will connect Office of Indian Education (or similar) personnel with offices that make decisions about programs and practices to ensure they include Native interests when making decisions. Overall, tribal consultation with state program developers and adopters ensures Native student interests are properly represented in decision making and improves the program's effectiveness.

Examples of Locally Created Programs

The following programs for Native students, schools, and the communities that serve them are examples of the variety of programs that begin locally and show promise as models for other places. By providing these examples, no claim is made to their promise or evidence of their effectiveness. Those considerations are made by the individual states, tribes, and localities.

College Horizons

Founded in 1999, College Horizons is a pre-college access program for Native students (http://collegehorizons.org/). The program follows the motto, "College Pride, Native Pride," which aligns with many aspects of Native identity and culture. Participation in College Horizons gives Native students an advantage over their peers in the college application process, which is especially important to students from under-resourced high schools. It provides students with the skills necessary to maneuver the college application process successfully, such as being able to speak knowledgeably and confidently with college personnel.

Keene (2016) explains that College Horizons instills confidence in Native students, showing them that having a college degree does not detract from, replace, diminish, or compete with their Native identity. Native students are diverse and bring different tribal perspectives, experiences, connections, values, stories, responsibilities, and histories with them when entering the college application process and entering higher education. Keene (2016) explains that, unlike many other college preparatory programs, College Horizons addresses the positives and challenges of college head on. It asks students to find resilience and strength from their culture when preparing to "move from their home communities into what is likely a predominantly white college environment" (Keene, 2016, p. 87).

Keene (2016) describes College Horizons as a "beacon of hope" for Native students who historically rank far below non-Native students in high school graduation rates, college attendance, and college graduation rates. A model of success in a challenging educational landscape, the program boasted an impressive return on investment in 2015, with 99% of program alumni enrolling directly in college, 95% enrolling in 4-year institutions, and 85% graduating from college in 5 years (Keene, 2016). Beyond the numbers are the testimonials from alumni, participants, current and former faculty and staff members, parents, deans of admission, and tribal community members witnessing the program's success.

During the program, Native students spend a week participating in daily sessions to prepare them for college. The week includes opening and closing prayers, hosts a resident from the local community, a "traditional night" where students share their cultural talents, and ongoing and explicit conversations about citizenship and identity. At the end of the week, with a newfound sense of confidence, identity, and community, these students will have completed their common application, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a résumé, a polished college essay, and a list of 10 schools that are good matches for their abilities and interests (Keene, 2016).

Denver Public Schools American Indian Focus Schools

In 2008, of Denver Public Schools' more than 75,000 students, 835 (1.11%) identified as Native. This program is nestled in the school system's six American Indian focus schools, which are similar to magnet schools, in Denver, CO. The focus schools interweave high levels of achievement with culturally relevant practices, resulting in a supportive teaching and learning environment.

> Native language and culture and high-quality instruction in content areas are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are complementary and equally important elements for enhancing the knowledge and academic achievement of Native children.
> (Oakes and Maday, 2009, p. 9)

Established in 1994, the focus schools operate similar to magnet schools "to provide better services [to the district's Native students]" (Oakes and Maday, 2009, p. 7). Since their establishment, the focus schools have emphasized "the importance of mentors and their knowledge of special education policy … creating a climate of challenge and care, high academic standards, and varied and intensive support" (Oakes and Maday, 2009, p. 7). The school system offers courses in 10 languages, including Lakota.

Oakes and Maday (2009) share a few reflective questions to consider when reviewing classroom materials for cultural relevance based on the 24 criteria identified by Slapin and Seale (1998) in *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children,* as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reflective questions to determine cultural relevance in classroom materials

Reflective questions to determine cultural relevance in classroom materials for (Oakes and Maday, 2009)	
Area for Reflection	**Questions**
Lifestyles	• Does the discussion refer to Native people in the past tense only, supporting the "vanished Indian" myth? • Is the continuity of cultures represented with values, religions, morals, an outgrowth of the past, and connected to the present?
Distortions of history	• Does the material represent Native heroes as the only people believed to have aided Europeans in the conquest of their own people? • Does the material identify an admiration for Native heroes in relation to what they may have done for their own people?
The effects on a child's self image	• Is there anything in the story that would embarrass or hurt an Native child?

Reflective questions to determine cultural relevance in classroom materials for (Oakes and Maday, 2009)	
Area for Reflection	**Questions**
	• Are there one or more positive role models with whom an Native child can identify?

Healthy & Empowered Youth Project

The Healthy & Empowered Youth (HEY) Project is a school- and community-based youth development program focused on addressing unhealthy behaviors among youth in Native communities (https://www.facebook.com/pg/HEY-Project-Healthy-Empowered-Youth-Project-137016612985035/about/). The HEY Project used Native STAND (Students Together against Negative Decisions), a peer education curriculum, to promote healthy decision-making, share information about more positive lifestyles, and help Native high school students make informed and healthier life choices. Throughout the program, Native high school students examined ways to prevent health risk behaviors, promote healthier life choices, increase cultural awareness, and develop sustainable life skills. (Rushing et al., 2017)

The Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board and a northwest tribe collaborated with the Oregon Health & Science University's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded Prevention Research Center in 2010-2012 to implement and evaluate the HEY Project. HEY's curriculum included guest speakers, field trips, after-school activities and summer camps, and hands-on training in video production and media literacy for various media outlets, such as YouTube and Facebook. Professional filmmakers provided training for two teachers who served as facilitators. The project consists of 27 90-minute classroom sessions that use active learning methods to guide students on topics related to healthy relationships, self-esteem, preventing sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancy, and avoiding substance abuse.

The Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, in collaboration with a number of other organizations, developed the Healthy Native Youth website (https://www.healthynativeyouth.org/website) that provides other health promotion curricula and resources for Native youth in addition to STAND. For example, We R Native Teacher's Guide, is a 10-session guide offering interactive lessons using multimedia health resources with students 13 to 18 years old. Activities incorporate connection to culture as a protective factor, while covering vital information about suicide prevention, mental health, sexual health, dating and relationships, drug and alcohol use, and bullying.

Indian Education for All in Montana

Montana's Indian Education for All Act (IEFA) is a shared responsibility designed to strengthen democracy by fostering relationships and presenting multiple perspectives over a culturally homogenized curriculum (http://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All).

> IEFA "exemplifies the shared tenets of multicultural education theorists and the practice of culturally responsive pedagogy," and "serves as a model for all educators dedicated to embracing American ideals of social justice and educational equity." (Carjuzaa, Jetty, Munson, and Veltkamp, 2010, p. 192)

IEFA has transformed educational policy, curriculum, and pedagogy, addressing the historical and contemporary oppression of Native people.

IEFA replaces negative stereotypes with accurate understandings of Native history and the federal government's trust duty and reduces anti-Native bias through culturally relevant instruction and by instilling a sense of pride in cultural identity (Carjuzaa et al., 2010, p. 193). As a result of IEFA, Native students see their identities reflected in school curriculum more than ever before. "They [Native students] realize their identity does mean something to the real world, that someone off the rez really wants to learn about us" (Carjuzaa et al., 2010, p. 197).

Montana's accreditation standards require each school district to have a written policy that incorporates IEFA into the district's educational goals, classroom content, assessments, teacher preparation programs, and professional development programs. To fulfill these obligations, the Office of Public Instruction's (OPI) Native education records show that staff presented approximately 600 Native education-related workshops for public schools, colleges, universities, and educational organizations statewide. These efforts also promote equitable relationships and positive interactions between Native and non-Native educators. Additionally, when developing curricula, the district must provide books and materials containing authentic historical and contemporary representations of American Indians. Further, members of the Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education, which consists of Native educators from all tribes in the state, review curricula and IEFA policy to ensure appropriateness and authenticity. IEFA has evolved over the last 38 years to improve funding in support of the program and ensure curricular were culturally relevant.

Kamehameha Schools

The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) was a reading program designed for and adapted to the cultural needs and abilities of those children and uses culturally congruent instruction. KEEP was developed in Honolulu, HI, by researchers who paid special attention to the home environments of young Hawaiian children. KEEP incorporated a culturally responsive pedagogy that was congruent with the traditional cultural and contemporary ways of knowing and learning, stressing the traditional cultural characteristics and adult-child interactions.

> KEEP is important as an example of a deliberate attempt to take account of the cultural backgrounds and abilities developed in the community and design an instructional program which is both culturally congruent with community practices and manageable in the public schools. (Calfee et al., 1981, p. 3)

While KEEP ended in the 1990s, the research was adapted to other Native educational settings, including tribal schools, and is now the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (https://manoa.hawaii.edu/coe/crede/).

Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District

The Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District takes an all-encompassing approach to provide a culturally relevant curriculum (http://www.ktjusd.k12.ca.us/). The district ensures its content is relevant and appropriate for Native students. Located on the rural Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation in California, the largest reservation in the state, the district's two largest schools, Hoopa Elementary and Hoopa High, have a majority Native student population.

> There is a lot of misinformation out there about Native American cultures, and we must continue to correct the wrongs that teachers have experienced in their own education.
> Hoopa Valley Tribal Education Director Greg Matson (Oakes and Maday, 2009, p. 4)

School and district staff review existing classroom materials for bias, stereotypes, and accuracy and adopt new culturally respectful materials. Mr. Matson explains that the district relies on its community to provide culturally relevant content. So, the district engages Native families and community members to review the materials, identify topics for professional development, and serve as mentors (Oakes and Maday, 2009, p. 8).

Lakota Circles of Hope

Recognizing the opportunity to provide a culturally based, risk-behavior prevention program, a group of Native educators created the Lakota Circles of Hope (LCH) to help elementary school children make healthy decisions based on their cultural and traditional value system (https://lakotacirclesofhope.org/). Based on his study of the program, Usera (2017) asserts that LCH helped positively influence students' Lakota identity, risk behaviors, respect for others, and communications with parents and other adults. Programs like LCH can reduce and reverse students' distorted views and negative behaviors by providing them with tools to cope with negative outcomes they may face, regardless of the challenges within their environment.

Parents, educators, and community members have identified this program as a first step in helping introduce young people, families, and educators to the prevention of substance use, depression, and antisocial behavior. (Usera, 2017, p. 177).

Students are introduced to LCH in second grade, and the program extends through fifth grade. Students complete 10 lessons per grade level for a total of 40 lessons. LCH addresses sensitive topics—topics related to substance use, antisocial behaviors, depression prevalence, and intentions and practices to engage in risky behaviors—in a developmentally appropriate manner. The pedagogical framework places the discussion of making healthy life choices in the context of the Lakota values of generosity, fortitude (courage), wisdom, and respect. It includes Lakota stories, cultural crafts and activities, knowledge content, discussion, and application to daily life.

Family and community are major components of LCH, as children rely on their family and their social, community, peers, and elders. These people have a great effect on child-rearing practices, attitudes, values, and behaviors. They may also influence the child's life decisions related to drug abuse, sexual activity, involvement in violence, or suicidal feelings as they enter adolescence.

Usera (2017) shared the results of a study used to determine if LCH improved the children's:

- understanding of the Lakota values, traditions, and practices;
- understanding of the health risks caused by alcohol, tobacco, and chemical substance use;
- ability to resolve conflicts using learned skills and techniques;
- self-esteem and self-efficacy; and
- communication skills with their parents, elders, and other trusted adults. (Usera, 2017, pp. 177-178)

Usera (2017) reports that approximately 87.0% of the participating educators and community members believed the lessons contained a high level of knowledge about the Lakota values and traditions. All of the teachers believed the students gained from the experience and increased their knowledge and awareness of the need to make healthy decisions. Additionally, 88% believed the lessons presented good information about substance use and its effect on a person's health. Over 90% of the respondents felt the program was very good and believed there should be more time dedicated to teaching it.

Native Science Field Centers

Augare et al. (2017) profile three Native Science Field Centers (NSFCs): the Blackfeet NSFC (https://bfcc.edu/native-science-field-center/), the Lakota NSFC (https://www.giways.org/), and the Wind River NSFC. NSFCs encouraged Native students to complete high school and pursue higher education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and diversify the STEM workforce for Native professionals.

How Native scientists can help tribal communities (Augare et al., 2017, p. 229):

- retain their languages, cultures, and identities;
- manage their resources;
- support their political and economic development; and
- work with mainstream institutions.

These NSFCs were created to help stimulate Native students and adults' interest in pursuing academic and career paths in STEM fields, as Native students have been historically underrepresented in higher education, representing about 1% of total enrollment in colleges and universities in 2006 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008), and the rate of Native enrollment and degree attainment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines remains relatively low (Augare et al., 2017). These NSFCs provided several effective educational strategies and advantages in combining Native traditional knowledge and languages with Western science concepts.

The NSFC model's four goals (Augare et al. 2017, p. 235):

- develop NSFC as a model to replicate with future programs in neighboring tribal communities;
- expand STEM career-ladder learning opportunities for youth and adults by strengthening math and science teaching and increasing participation in each community;
- develop appropriate Native program evaluation tools and methodologies; and
- document best educational and evaluation practices to inform community members, other tribes, and the informal science education community.

Augare et al. (2017) describe how the diverse characteristics of geography, history, and the tribes formed the foundation of the NSFCs' community-specific frameworks. Though independent, they had several characteristics in common: similar organizational funding strategies, reciprocal capacity building, and program approaches. Some of the NSFCs' greatest strengths were extensive community partnerships, outreach events, and training opportunities at each site.

Augare et al. (2017) identify the integration of Native languages as the most essential component of the NSFC model. Native languages helped show the diversity of traditional relationships within local ecological communities. Students used their language to learn about, identify, and inventory culturally significant plants and animals, reconnecting them to traditional cultural practices through ancient stories and contemporary field practices. Community elders also shared their knowledge of native plants and animals and the cultural significance and history of local places with NSFC students.

Hopa Mountain, a nonprofit based in Bozeman, MT, established the NSFCs in partnership with the Blackfeet Community College on the Blackfeet Reservation, Fremont County School District #21 on the

Wind River Reservation, and Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Grants from the National Science Foundation and the Bush Foundation and support from educational institutions within the community provided funding for the NSFCs. Due to transitions in funding sources and programming, NSFCs no longer have the same operational capacity, but they continue to build upon the positive impacts discussed by Augare et al. (2017).

Rough Rock Community School

The Rough Rock school board in northern Arizona received a federal grant to create a permanent, sequential, bilingual curriculum in Navajo studies for grades K–9 that was infused with key Navajo values (http://www.roughrock.k12.az.us/). Through this program, the Rough Rock Community School is setting high standards for the success of Native youth while grounding them in the cultural values and perspectives of the Navajo people (Oakes and Maday, 2009, p. 4). Additionally, the students responded positively to the program, since the materials incorporate their background and experiences.

The program focuses on the Navajo value of k'e (kinship, clanship, and right and respectful relations with others and with nature). With insights from Rough Rock community members, parents, teachers, and students, the Native American Materials Development Center designed the curriculum around k'e concepts and problem-solving abilities that also promoted competency in English and Navajo.

Zuni Public School District

The Zuni Public School District (PSD) in Zuni, NM, is the nation's first tribally controlled, independent, public school system (https://www.zpsd.org/). Zuni tribal members established the Zuni Public School District in 1980 to meet the needs of their children. High school principal, Dr. Richard Yzenbaard, explains that working with Native youth takes a hard-working staff who care about the kids. Dr. Yzenbaard believes that Zuni PSD's success is due to their multidisciplinary approach to the work: "It's not just one class, as all departments support the approach." The program focuses on strengthening student relationships as a foundation for the curriculum's relevance and rigor.

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