



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
EDUCATION & SOCIETY PROGRAM



Aspen Institute Roundtable:

Opportunities in American Indian
Education

October 27, 2017

KEY FINDINGS

- Since time immemorial, tribes have shown that the key to the educational success of their children is **control over their own education**. Policymakers should ground their approaches on contemporary models that put language, culture, and social and emotional learning at the heart of their educational systems.
- **There is a renaissance of Native youth organizing** taking place across the country and among their top priorities are language and culture revitalization, and education.
- Some of our biggest successes are taking place at the **very local level**, and some of the strongest near-term success is local.
- Youth, community members, and educators agree that **there is a serious lack of culturally-relevant curricula** and a distinct need to educate non-Native students about local tribal communities. Policymakers should focus on models like the *Since Time Immemorial Curriculum* in Washington state.
- **We need to significantly increase resources for Native teacher training pathways and connect them to tribally-controlled education models.**
- Native communities and education leaders need more resources and focus on models that challenge the current Western definition of success—especially those that rely on testing. Some of the strongest successes have come from **broad community planning processes where a diverse range of stakeholders have worked to define what they see as success for the education of their children.**

OPENING AND FRAMING REMARKS

- In order for Native children to thrive we must increase the number of Native American educators in the classroom.
- Native American youth have a right to learn about their cultures and their history, and it is imperative that they are able to learn from their elders.

- It is crucial to define what success means within the context of American Indian education, and for this to be determined *by* indigenous peoples and not *for* them.
- We need to be vigilant and proactive in our policy advocacy efforts. Recently, people have rallied around the Yazzie v. State of New Mexico court case that seeks to improve school conditions for underserved Native students. It is crucial to identify next steps and how to maintain this momentum.
- We need to think of Native American cultures and languages as armor for our Native youth. To succeed in instilling this strength in our youth we must expand the pool of Native teachers in our classrooms.
- We need to provide youth with “tools for success” that have been passed down to us from our ancestors for generations.
- We need to be able to help Native youth prepare for college both mentally and emotionally, while also helping to create pathways for them to come back home once they have received their degree.

SESSION 1 – PROGRESS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATING NATIVE YOUTH

Strengths/Assets of Native youth

- Curiosity.
- Creativity.
- Empathy.
- Connection to the land.
- Sense of self that is greater than the individual – commitment to social justice.
- A sense of protocol and respect.
- Cultural knowledge and teachings--prayers, songs, food, and language.
- Hunger to learn.

Barriers

- Native youth carry the burden of intergenerational trauma passed down to them by previous generations and they continue to suffer because of it.
- Systemic racism and oppression.
- Perceived lack of confidence.
- Imposter syndrome.
- Forced to navigate systems that don't value American Indian strengths or where they come from.
- Narrow definition of success.
- Forced to adhere to an either/or dichotomy of either tests/standards or language/culture.
- One-size-fits-all systems, “no excuses” systems.
- Dependence on structures that privilege technology over kinship.

- Institutions that devalue indigenous thought.
- Deficit approach – a negative narrative of Native youth. They *are* the gap.
- Curriculum is not relevant.
- Self-colonization (internalized oppression) – Native adults devaluing Native youth.

How Policy Contributes to Barriers/Challenges

- Policy is not created by Native Americans, but *for* Native Americans.
- Native issues are seen as a side note, not as a core cause.
- Lack of relevant curriculum, or culturally sensitive curriculum and instruction.
- Too much testing.
- Lack of Native leaders of Native institutions.
- Current political environment; Trumpism.
 - “But is Trumpism markedly different than the past 200 years?”

EDUCATION REFORM: CURRENT TRENDS AND EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Kevin Shendo, Director, Pueblo of Jemez Department of Education

- Focused on whole systems change and how best to fundraise for such wide reaching work.
- Our goal is that by 2020, we define the standards, the assessment, and that other systems adapt to our model.
- Through a community-wide strategic-planning process 14 years ago, Jemez asserted its authority and desire to determine what is most important to the education of our tribal citizens. Priority was placed on the Jemez language and culture, which is the heart of how, where, and what we teach our children to ensure the survival and advancement of our Jemez people.
- Working with higher education institutions, foundations, and the Head Start program, Jemez initiated efforts to take ownership over the education of our children. We developed Jemez education standards, rooted in the Jemez language and culture.
- Our infants are our tribe’s most precious resource, and as such the Jemez Department of Education was redesigned to reflect a comprehensive approach to education, beginning with the ECE and working up to college students and adult learners.
- With Head Start we worked to change regulations about native language instruction. Now, any federally funded program can deliver instruction in home language.
- Now the focus is transitioning programs with the feeder schools in Jemez and reinforcing the importance of grounding the children in their home language. This includes curriculum, vertical alignment, and practices of all our Jemez feeder schools. It also directly led to a focused professional-development and training effort on the effective implementation of the common core while honoring local languages and cultures. The priorities are topics that influence language, culture, community-based

learning, and experiential learning, as well as state and federal education policies. The work that we are doing together is the first of its kind nationally.

- Jemez also entered into a memorandum of understanding with the state of New Mexico to support certification for tribally approved specialists in Jemez language and culture. Jemez is responsible for determining the certification process for these specialists. In turn, the state will recognize the tribe's authority and grant alternative certification for the recommended individuals to teach within the public schools.
- We charter our own schools – for the high school, we had to appeal the local school board decision, they didn't want us to run our own school as a charter. As a result, we started an education collaborative. Now principals across all the schools meet regularly, along with Bernalillo Public Schools.
- We have challenges with local districts, with the Bureau of Indian Education, with the state, with HHS. Now we're challenging the state on PARCC – because it is all in English. The state said they're willing to invest in a Native language assessment but it has yet to be seen.

Trish Moquino, Co-founder, Keres Children's Learning Center

- Keres Children's Learning Center (KCLC) is a Montessori school that uses the Cochiti Keres language for daily instruction across all areas of learning, beginning with children ages 3-6 years old. Located on the Pueblo de Cochiti reservation in New Mexico.
- Our focus is on teaching language. *Giving* language. Not on teaching good test scores. The Cochiti language is fundamental in the transmission of cultural knowledge and traditional values and the development of strong individuals and community identities.
- The Cochiti people have always recognized that every individual who enters this world has a gift to share. Every child comes with a purpose and all children should be honored.
- We strive to honor our heritage by using a comprehensive cultural and academic curriculum to assist families in nurturing Keres-speaking, holistically healthy, community minded, and academically strong students.
- An essential element of development is respect for the child.
- In addition to language and academics, we also focus on emotional development through teaching two fundamental Keres principles: harmony (spirituality) and kinship (relationship with others.) Through these principles children learn their dual roles as individuals and community members. This emphasis reaffirms the individual child as an integral and important part of a community rather than focusing on an individualistic or competitive emphasis.
- Respect is one of the most important values in Pueblo culture. Our Keres language has many sayings and behaviors that teach children the ways in which we show one another respect so as to live more harmoniously in our communities. KCLC honors these practices of grace and courtesy according to the traditional values and beliefs of the Cochiti Pueblo.
- There is a craze around outcomes and data, but it is important to identify whose outcomes are they, and who do they serve?

- Western education shouldn't be at the expense of Native language. This is about the survival of our people.
- Our biggest challenge is that there is no teacher training center. Nobody focuses on indigenous education philosophy.

Ryan Fowler, TNTF

- Rural places are not valued in education.
- Education becomes a tool that influences the out-migration of talent.
- We know teachers feel isolation and disconnected from community.
- Teachers need to be recruited, not to schools, but to places. Without connection to place teachers will feel isolated and disconnected within their school community.
- We need to focus on the application of education to the local economy. Not just the student.
- Barriers – Systems barriers. IT, data. There is a lot of injustice in technology, screening processes, etc.

Crystal Gonzales, EL Success Forum

- As a part of New Mexico's sordid history, my parents were punished for speaking Spanish, and were hit in school for doing so. As such they decided their students and children should not speak Spanish. I had to go and learn my Native language in college and beyond.
- The focus of a lot of work nationally is on the development of open resources and new materials aligned to the common core.
- It is challenging to inform students and schools on how to be good consumers.
- As a result, the tools we have – largely from big publishers – are not culturally relevant, or in Native languages. In response to this deficiency teachers build their own materials.
- SAP, Achieve, CCSSO, CGCS are all national groups working in this space.
- The state of Louisiana ran a process to rate instructional materials and try and get the best materials into teachers' hands. CCSSO is trying to spread this practice to other states.

SESSION III – TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUTH SERVING SECTOR

Erik Stegman, Center for Native American Youth

- Many Native youth were taken from their families and sent to boarding schools. Their culture was made a sin and practicing it was forbidden.
- The education systems were used against our culture in an effort to “wash the Indian white.”

- One of the powerful ways to repudiate these oppressive systems of education is to ask Native youth what they want from their own education—how it can best serve *them* and *their* communities.
- CNAY just finished its national survey of Native youth online about the resources they need. Among the top three issues important to Native youth were culture and language revitalization, and improving educational resources about Native people.
- During our roundtables with Native youth and service providers in communities across the country, we also hear that the issue of bullying and lack of understanding of culture and community by non-Native peers is a serious issue.
- The bottom line of much of what we hear from Native youth is that we must focus time, energy, and resources in supporting Native youth at school. Schools are a powerful place that bring youth together and can be a vital organizing platform.
- There is an explosion of Native youth organizing across the country, bolstered by pivotal moments like Standing Rock and President Obama’s Generation Indigenous initiative. As educators, administrators, and community stakeholders look at ways to improve education, it’s critical that they make safe and supportive school climates and environments a priority, as this will strengthen these platforms and movements for youth and generations to come.

John Henry, Student

- Instead of asking students what they want to be, we should be asking “What do you want to do in your community?”
- Everyone is a descendent of a tribe.
- Spent time at La Placita as a place to heal. To sweat, learn prayers and songs. I learned about food justice. It was overall a tremendously powerful and empowering experience.
- We need Native language and culture as part of our education.
- There seems to be an “indigenous renaissance” spreading across the continent. This renaissance has, in part, been sparked by Standing Rock.
- Learned it is okay to be Native. It is okay to be brown. It is okay to *think* indigenous.
- The biggest opportunities are ahead.

SESSION IV - MOVING THE WORK AHEAD

What assets do our Native youth bring to the experience of their education?

- Students’ access to technology to enhance their curiosity and bring perspective.
- More opportunities for college- address social justice, ample college programs.
- Students bring their ancestral knowledge and language.
- Hunger to learn is there- bring objective lens.

Stones in their path, in their journey to become Native leaders/students

- Facing internal issues.
- Perceived lack of confidence.
- Disbelief in their ability.
- Systems that don't value Native youth and their cultures.
- Standardized test.
- One size fits all systems.
- Reliance on external forces to teach.
- Institutions devaluing indigenous values, ideology.
- Broader negative narrative.
- Only path after high-school is college.
- Systemic oppression.
- Self-colonization.
- Historic and present-day trauma.

Institutions and policies that reinforce impediments

- Not created for us by us.
- Increasing focus on testing for math and reading- core courses.
- Lack of resources i.e. culturally relevant curricula.
- Lack of leadership in institutions.
- Unapologetic sovereignty message.
- Settler colonists thinking, not value assets that students bring.
- Global policy?

Foundations

Start:

- Mentoring your future program officers, executive directors, and board members now. They are likely attending K-12 Indian schools.
- Reevaluating criteria for funding.
- Taking risk on outcomes other than your own.
- Supporting the leveraging of funding sources that can be used for developing facilities.
- Funding innovation in Native communities in K-12 directly without preconceived notion of what innovation should be.
- Realizing equity means money in Native communities and representation on board not just panels.
- Funding "grow your own" teacher preparation pathways in Native communities.
- Providing funding that is based on community led outcomes.
- Fund Native children's college tuition with the expectation they return to tribal communities to mentor.
- Investing.
- Investing in teacher-level collaboration across localities.

- Fund teacher prep. programs fully: undergrad, masters.
- Seed \$50.00 for every kindergarten Native student in IDA or 529 college savings program.
- Direct funding for tribal sovereignty.
- Building more equitable processes for grant proposals, allowing tribes and orgs with smaller development capacity equal opportunity to pursue dollars.

Continue:

- Giving money to support after school programs.
- Empower local and tribal communities.
- Lift up modules for bi-lingual and culturally appropriate school modules and programs.
- Advocacy for systems change.
- Investing in tribal schools.
- Funding innovative models of youth and K-12 education.
- Willingness to listen to Native communities.
- Supporting Native communities in reimaging their education systems and what success looks like.
- Finding and highlighting promising practices to support change.
- Building youth and community networks.
- Providing funding that supports real community needs and not on already established agenda/priorities.
- Funding indigenous led education.
- Working around strengthening/supporting families.
- Learning on past mistakes.
- Exploring the impacts of trauma on learning and identifying trauma informed best practices, fund orgs that help schools with this work.
- Expanding the funding of out-of-school learning (after-school, summer school) at schools and community orgs.

Stop:

- And truly listen.
- Aligning to federal agenda.
- “Putting points on the board’ using universal, contact-free scoring systems.
- Thinking that what has worked in other contexts can be translated or easily implemented in our communities.
- Evaluating outcomes on foundation requirements.

National Organizations

Start:

- Start engaging youth at an earlier point in the work – not as an afterthought or after plan has been developed.

- Engaging Native Students systematically to provide direction and convene Native youth in both in DC and in Tribal Nations.
- Developing effective practices with local practitioners.
- Engaging K-12 early learning and higher education as one goal.
- Inviting students voices in all meetings.
- Continue to include Native American education in their work and engage communities.
- Expanding definition of equity in education to include focus on Native Youth and communities.
- Deeper project based relationship that last 3-7 years.
- Promoting community led discussion and structure of Native orgs.
- CNAY visiting Pueblo communities and education organization in our communities.
- Go to the source.
- Remodeling our Native communities relationships and let them determine agenda.
- Leveraging the power of tribes to drive priorities and advocate for more influential policy making.
- Developing locally driven initiatives rather than national strategies that actually put tribal communities in the driver's seat.

Continue:

- The conversation like these that bridge the distance between the federal and the local.
- The push for policy and federal support Native education.
- Advocate for systems change.
- Implementing developing structures that eliminate privilege, imbalance, and social location at decision makers.
- Develop more teacher prep approaches that are culturally appropriate.
- CNAY please start being more accessible.
- To empower local and tribal communication.
- Serve as a connector to people across states.

Stop:

- Funding ineffective programs.
- Presuming there are general "best practices."
- Making "case studies" and other retrospective records of learning.
- NIEA please decolonize.
- Working top down bring in outside recommendation. Instead work to engage communities in problem solving processes.
- Telling tribal EPU programs how to operate.
- Being influenced by stereotypes, bias, and misrepresentations about Native Americans

Policy Makers

Start:

- Involving more student voice and perspectives into policy.
- Connecting between education and other systems that impact youth and their families.
- Reframing the message.
- Rethinking schools.
- Making policy based on what you hear from the community.
- Supporting tribes to define their own definition of success.
- Incentivize universities who increase Native representation and results.
- Including indigenous education.
- Having communities create their own systems of education based on their priorities.
- Supporting tribally controlled grant schools as a transition.
- Changing policy to enable funding to support Native education.
- To correct the issue of student identification.
- Providing ample funds for school facilities, food services, and transportation.
- Engagement.
- Teacher certification programs for licensure created by tribal community according to their needs.
- Giving money to a national Native/poc teacher recruitment efforts.
- Develop capacity around advocacy.
- Listen.
- Funding Native schools to create alternative standards.
- Creating policy that allows for funding to support Native orgs.
- Funding indigenous led education.
- Designing education systems to support sustainable community development.
- Being intentional with bringing authentic voices from Native communities to sit with decision makers table affecting our own communities.
- Develop Native language revitalization courses.
- Creating specific programs for community needs.
- Create alternative licensure paths that are affordable.
- Recognizing and develop tools by communities and orgs that are based in indigenous values.
- Allocating resources for indigenous language revitalization.
- Recognizing Native educators and students.
- Equality in public school funding.
- Single-payer Healthcare.

Continue:

- Continue to emphasize stakeholder engagement and increase tribal input.
- To expand focus on Indian Education.
- Allowing tribally controlled schools to negotiate terms.
- Engagement.
- Supporting language revitalization efforts and programs.

Stop:

- Ignoring Native education.
- Promoting monolingual school systems.
- Assuming.
- Men need to stop abusing, raping, and assaulting Native women.
- Standardized testing.
- Basing successful programming on only standardized assessments, look at qualitative data.
- Evaluating schools solely on academic performance.
- Labeling children.
- Valuing bureaucracy over student outcomes.
- Deciding what is best for Native communities.
- Funding the tyranny of testing and outcomes that don't work for Native children.

CLOSING DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

- If we don't commit to language and culture in schools, where does it get done? Even within and across tribes, that commitment is not clear.
- We need to listen to the voice of parents. We *make* them feel disconnected. We make them disengage. The state is telling them what success is. Not asking them.
- Our communities used to be self-sustaining. Why not anymore? Because the education system changed that. But we can change it back. We need to not fear the system. The deficit orientation has been ingrained and taught.
- Policymakers are influential messengers—they can often dissuade parents from culture-centered approaches to education through the language of standards and testing. It's important to focus on policymakers and administrators when it comes to translation at the top.
- We need to teach youth to recognize oppression around them.
- We need to find ways to impact policy. How do we get our voices at the table?
- We have similar mindsets even though we come from different backgrounds. Some tribes are patriarchal. Some are matriarchal. We need to honor women. Women have wisdom.
- We need to reframe "what is a good school" – bringing in culture and language.
- We need to reset the policy conversation about education and transform it into one where improving education and schools is part of a larger vision to create sustainable and thriving communities.
- Reminded of how much power there is at the local level, with visionary leadership.
- Right now we look to student voice to affirm our existing agenda, and not to challenge our assumptions.
- We need to remember how sacred our children are. Each child is born with a purpose.
- We need to think about message and communications – how we talk about culture and identity. We are *all* part of legacies.

- Need to remember the power of relationships.
- In Navajo, we have two sides; the peacemaker and the warrior. Sometimes we need war to make peace. There are some injustices in this world we need to end. Things are just not right.
- There is a fear that students will not be served if we don't measure it. We need to balance fear with faith.
- We need to challenge the status quo of what success is, to challenge the Western paradigms that have been institutionalized.
- It is daunting to go up against power brokers.

FOLLOW UP

- The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program will publish an issue brief informed by our roundtable in early 2018. This brief will outline the opportunities and challenges for educating all students, including Native youth, through a racial equity lens that values Native cultures and languages. This brief will include key recommendations for education leaders and will lead to a follow-up toolkit to be published later in 2018.
- Our Albuquerque roundtable is part of CNAY's ongoing Policy and Resource Roundtable Series. CNAY has held these roundtables throughout the years on key issues that highlight Native youth priorities. These convenings provide an opportunity for Native youth to share their insights directly with policymakers, service providers, and other stakeholders. The findings from these roundtables inform all of our work, but we welcome ideas from participants about new ways to partner and follow-up on the issues discussed. Please contact Aaron Slater at aaron.slater@aspeninst.org with any other ideas for follow-up and further collaboration.