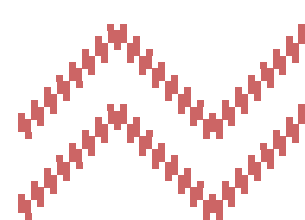


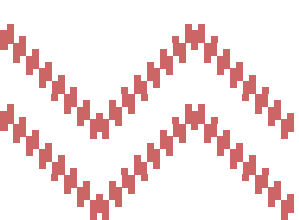


# Seeing Our Native Students.

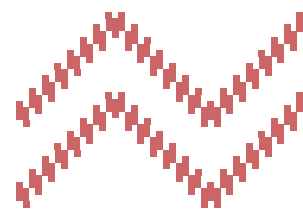
## A Guide for Educators

A collaborative project  
Four Winds of Indian Education  
and Redbud Resource Group





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# Letter to the Reader: Seeing Our Native Students

by Taylor Pennewell | President, Redbud Resource Group

I once asked a fellow educator about reforming parts of our school to better reflect the cultural needs of local Native and Indigenous students. Without missing a beat, my colleague responded that, unfortunately, the school did not have any Native students in it.

*Perhaps, I said, it isn't that Native students don't attend this school, it's that you don't see them.* Sure enough, there were multiple Native students in the classes I taught that year.

After I mentioned to my colleague that I had Native students in my class, they flooded me with statements about Native people and culture. They told me my students probably had connections to the local casino. They also claimed my students received benefits from the U.S. government. All the while they assured me they had only the utmost respect for Native culture.

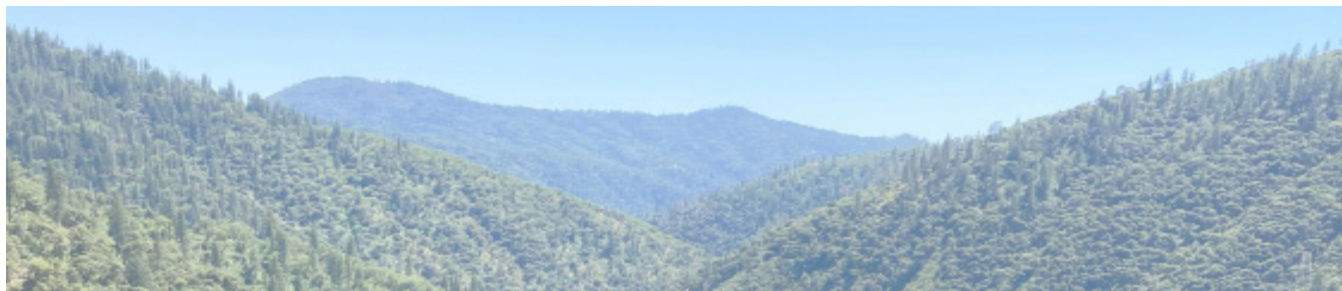
Despite acknowledging the existence of several Native students at the school, this colleague still failed to see them as people. Instead they assigned the students a cultural identity that reflected not only superficial, but also false ideas of what it means to be Native in the United States.

This educator is a good person. Like many, they believe that 21<sup>st</sup> century educators should be innovative, adaptive, and flexible. They are motivated to push for reform in all the right places. We spent many lunches and after school meetings talking about what we could do to better serve our students. Still, in this situation, we were on different pages.

Why are Native students so often overlooked in their school environments? Every community in the United States has Native families. So why do we regularly fail to recognize, involve, and build meaningful relationships with Native people?

Over half of state-level curricula fails to mention even a single Native person by name in K-12 curriculum. Nine in ten state-level history standards do not mention Native peoples after the 1900s.<sup>1</sup> For many people, this void in exposure to Native history, culture, and knowledge is filled by Native (mis)representations in pop-culture and wide-spread stereotypes about who Native people are.<sup>2</sup> We've been taught that Native peoples symbolize a bygone era of American expansion.<sup>2</sup> We may think of cowboys and Indians, great battles and teepees. We might talk about social issues famously plaguing Native reservations. But do we really understand what is behind these stories, or to what extent they are even real?

In one of my first classes as a young teacher, I said something to a student that resulted in them pounding their head on their desk in a fit of rage. All I could do was place my hands between the desk and their head, desperately trying to stop them from hurting themselves. I was shocked how such a small comment could cause such a big reaction. The head banging incident led to a series of family meetings. I learned in great detail about my student's home life and complex cultural background. This experience taught me that my choices as a teacher are one of many pieces in a larger patchwork of experiences that affect my students.



My best teaching mentors showed me that great teachers aren't willing to simply accept challenging behavior or low academic performances as the norm. Great teachers are willing to look at the root of the problem and refine their work to best serve their students.

As this pamphlet is written, in the Fall semester of 2020, students across the nation are grappling with a whole new range of challenges. Lack of access to technology and internet, less supervision, and the threat of illness, are just a few of the new pressures students face.

Knowing there is a connection between student engagement and students feeling seen by their teachers, a good place for teachers to start building relationships is by learning about students' home cultures.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup>

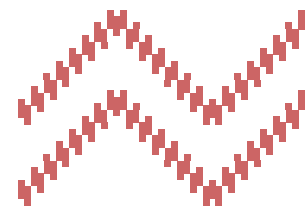
<sup>6</sup> Reading this guide may be a first step in learning about the structures and cultural context in which your Native students live. Each section provides research-based information that has been reviewed with Tribal communities. We include suggestions and questions to help educators reflect on the impact that curriculum and school structure have on Native students and families.

Using this guide to improve the school experience is one piece of the puzzle- there are many ways to effectively serve Native students.<sup>7, 4, 6</sup> Every student has unique needs, and working with families to meet these needs is essential.<sup>4, 5</sup> We as teachers might not always understand why our students act out or shut down, or why our actions can cause such strong reactions. However, we can make a difference by expanding our understanding of those we serve.<sup>4, 3, 8</sup>

We hope this guide helps you see Native students as the dynamic, whole, and unique people they are. We anticipate that the tools offered in this guide can make your work as an educator even more rewarding while helping your students feel empowered, supported, and confident in their abilities.

*Taylor* *Emmanuel*





## There's a Problem? Making the Case for a Native Focused Educator Guide

**“These experiences are harming our Native students.”**

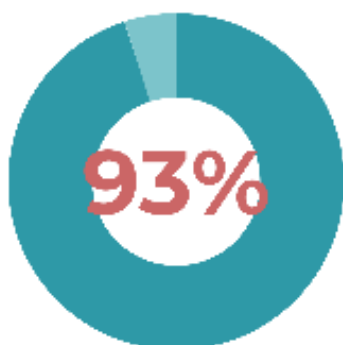
In a recent study of high-school students, almost all (93%) Native students surveyed reported experiencing discrimination in school.<sup>9</sup> This discrimination takes many forms. From peer level teasing or insensitive comments, to the invisibility Native students feel in the classroom when they see misrepresentations of Native people in their coursework.<sup>10, 9</sup>

These experiences are harming our Native students.

Native students are at the greatest risk of developing depression, expressing feelings of low self-worth, turning to drugs and alcohol, and dying from suicide than any other comparable group.<sup>11, 12, 13, 14</sup> Additionally, 1 in 2 Native students will leave school before finishing. Without a high school diploma, these students face a higher likelihood of experiencing poverty, poor health, and are at a higher risk of drug use and death by suicide<sup>15</sup> Intervening in K-12 education is one of the best ways to protect our students and make sure they have the tools, knowledge, and self-worth needed to thrive.<sup>15</sup>

Native students are not doomed to the statistics we see in research. With the help of a determined teacher, empathetic administrator, or committed educator Native students can access a whole different narrative.<sup>4, 3</sup> One where they are confident in their abilities to succeed and equipped to do so.

**We can make that difference.**



**of Native Students  
report experiencing  
discrimination in school**



**of Native Students will  
not graduate high school**



## SECTION 1

# Seeing Our Native Students: Contemporary Native Identity

**“Many Native Nations and communities have big plans for building and restrengthening our communities today, tomorrow, and far into the future.”**

When I was young, my Maidu grandmother used to take me to the mall to pick out new clothes when I had outgrown my old ones. Near the entrance was a tobacco shop. Outside the shop stood a man wearing a brilliant headdress. His eyes were serious, his mouth in a frown, his gaze looking out into the distance. He was made out of wood and smelled like cigars. Some of my earliest associations of tobacco are with this wooden statue, a symbol and guard for many tobacco shops across the United States. Even though he was made out of wood, the sight of him made me uneasy. When I saw other children jumping on him or sticking gum to his backside and laughing, I felt like they were doing these things to me and all of my relatives. I felt small. I felt that Native people like him, like me, didn't matter in any significant way. We were reduced to a decoration in a mall.

I have been told for a long time that to be Native in the United States is to be the grandchild of survivors. **Still to this day, Native peoples work endlessly to strengthen what cultural, linguistic, familial, and land ties we have.** It is clear that much of Native culture has been forced into dormancy.<sup>2</sup> But Native resilience prevails. Many Native nations and communities have big plans for building and restrengthening our communities today, tomorrow, and far into the future.<sup>17</sup>

By acting as allies, educators offer valuable help to Native communities as we strive to improve the lives of our people.<sup>18</sup> All people in the United States live on the traditional homelands of Native peoples.<sup>19</sup> Without knowing it, those same people may make it more difficult for Native people to thrive, even when they are actively trying to help.<sup>20</sup> The proliferation of Native stereotypes in popular culture, like the “cigar shop Indian” above, is just one example of the types of caricatures that hurt Native people.

You might be thinking: “Where do I even start?” Many people want to support Native people but have little understanding of what the Native experience is like in the first place.<sup>21</sup> Without some basic understanding, developing the kind of empathy that leads to lasting allyship is difficult.<sup>22</sup> It becomes hard to know how to move forward. This section of our guide attempts to make this clearer.



## SECTION 1 ♦ PART 1

# Laying the Groundwork: Where are We?

Many people are familiar with the calm feeling of walking through a forest. Trees—hundreds, maybe thousands of years old, tower to the sky, their canopies home to many different thriving organisms. The forest floor buzzes with plant, animal, insect, and mushroom communities. This vast web of life creates an abundance that is deeply grounding. For many people, the forest is a place of safety, a place to go when we want to feel at peace, or when we want to feel protected by a system more ancient and powerful than any in the modern human world.

For Native people, existence in the world is intimately tied to place.<sup>23</sup> Standing at the base of an ancient redwood tree, on the shore of a river, or at the edge of the Pacific Ocean, can feel like standing in deep solidarity with one's ancestors. These connections have existed for **time immorial**, or to a time that extends beyond human memory.<sup>24</sup> In this way, Native peoples live, thrive, and evolve in community with the natural world.<sup>23</sup>

So, where are we? Despite the simplicity of the question, it's one that has an answer you may not expect. **When you choose a place to live, you join the story of that place.** With that decision comes the responsibility of being a good guest on that land. A good guest shows respect to the land and to the people who have lived on that land for time immorial.

When we are aware of the Native communities in our local areas, our worldview begins to open.<sup>18</sup> We may have new questions, hear new stories, and deepen the connection to the places we and our students call home. Especially for our Native students, taking the time and effort to learn about the traditional and contemporary locations of Native people goes a long way in developing trust.<sup>4, 7</sup>



To help you gain a better understanding of where you live and the Native peoples who have stewarded the land, try answering the following questions:

1. What Native communities can you name?
2. Which of those communities are in your state?
3. What Native communities traditionally lived in your county?
4. Where are those communities now?

If you cannot answer these questions, we've made a list of steps you can take to begin to fill in any knowledge gaps:

Visit [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca) and type in your zip code. Take a moment to explore the traditional homelands of the local Native peoples in your area.

Go to [bia.gov](http://bia.gov) (Bureau of Indian Affairs) and search "Tribal Leaders Directory" to view a map of current Tribal government locations.

Go to [ihs.gov](http://ihs.gov) (Indian Health Services), and search "Federally Recognized Tribes by county". This will lead you to a list of every federally recognized Tribe in the state of California. To learn more about federally recognized Tribes, go to page # 16.

## SECTION 1 ♦ PART 2

# Moving Beyond the Box: The Wide Range of Native Identity

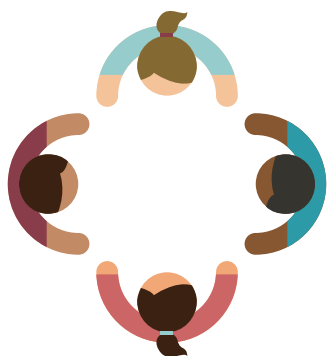
**EDUCATOR TIPS**

Integrated throughout are some considerations and suggestions for educators. These suggestions may prove helpful for supporting all students, not just Native youth.

What you see isn't what you get when it comes to working with human beings. Every student that enters your class has a life and identity shaped by their experiences and family history. While it is not expected or possible for educators to know everything about every student, having a basic understanding of the context in which students exist can help answer challenging questions around behavior, engagement, and family participation.<sup>7</sup>

Below, we explore just a few of the many cultural forces that impact Native identity. This list is by no means complete. It does not address other intersectional realities Native youth face, such as gender, sexual identity, language, education, religion, and more. The included topics are all, however, very powerful forces that shape a Native youth's identity.<sup>11, 25</sup>

## We're Not All the Same: Cultural Diversity vs. Pan-Indian Culture



Once, my grandparents went on a road trip through the Southwest region of the United States. They brought me home a beautiful white dreamcatcher to hang above my bed and told me it would help me have good dreams. Although dreamcatchers are traditional to the Ojibwe people, they have been adopted as a symbol of "**Pan-Indianism**," or the inter-Tribal sharing of cultural norms and goals.<sup>26</sup> Dreamcatchers became especially popular during the Indian Civil Rights movement of the 60's and 70's.<sup>26</sup>

As a child, I saw my dreamcatcher as a symbol of my Native heritage. I know now that there is a difference between a cultural symbol that is unique to my Tribe, and a cultural symbol that is used to unite Native people across Tribes.<sup>24</sup>

The lesson to learn is that there is not just one Native culture. **There are hundreds of independent Tribal communities today, each with their own culture, languages, stories, ceremonies, songs, and government structures.**

Yet, there are experiences, concepts, and cultural expressions that many Native peoples share. Some shared cultural norms may include respect for elders, respect for the planet, the importance of ceremony, and more. As time goes on, cultural practices may be shared across Tribes, who choose to unite and share when appropriate.

"Pan-Indianism" is sometimes used to strengthen cultural and political movements.<sup>27</sup> For example, during the Red Power Movement of the 1960's and 70's, Tribes across the United States banded together to demand the right to self-determination.<sup>27</sup> These Tribes were connected by common values and goals.

#### EDUCATOR TIP

When teaching about Native peoples, consider teaching about specific communities, as opposed to grouping all Native peoples together. For example, when teaching about the origin of Thanksgiving, clarify that it was the Wampanoag people who were involved, and that they are just one of many Tribes across the U.S..<sup>28</sup> This helps students understand the great diversity of Native culture. When exploring Pan-Indian movements, like the occupation of Alcatraz Island on Ohlone land (San Francisco, CA), point out that many Tribes united together in a movement rooted in Pan-Indian, or shared-values.<sup>27</sup>

Probably every Native person in the country has been asked about the percentage of Native blood they have.<sup>26, 9</sup> This question is referring to "**blood quantum**", and it is easily one of the most controversial elements of Native identity.<sup>10, 26</sup>

When Native peoples were first forcibly moved to reservations, the U.S. federal government issued requirements for Tribal membership. One such requirement was that of "blood quantum," referring to the amount of Native blood one has.<sup>29</sup> For example, a person's great grandmother may have been "full blooded" Native, while their daughter may be 1/2, their grandmother 1/4, their granddaughter 1/16, etc.<sup>26</sup>

Without a certain amount of blood, some Native people lose legal access to their Native identity under the federal government and sometimes even their own Tribe.<sup>26</sup> This is even the case for people whose close relatives are clearly Native.<sup>26</sup>

**Blood quantum requirements are designed to ensure that the Native population constantly reduces in size, and it has been used to place extra pressure on Native people to increase their children's blood quantum.** In communities that require a certain blood quantum for membership, every child a Native person has with someone outside of their Tribal community risks reducing the size of their community by having a child who does not meet the requirements.<sup>29</sup>

For example, if a Native woman has a child with someone outside of her Tribal community, it is possible that her child will not meet the blood quantum requirement for her Tribe. This may mean that her child does not qualify to be a

### Broken into Pieces: Blood Quantum



Tribal member.<sup>26</sup> For a woman whose community, culture, and sense of belonging is connected to her Tribal affiliation, having one's child rejected from their Tribe can be heartbreaking, and can place extra strain on the family as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

Seeing that blood quantum requirements put the Native population at risk, many Tribes have given up the practice.<sup>26</sup> Still, some Tribal governments place a blood quantum requirement on their own people.<sup>26</sup> It is important to remember that blood quantum is a colonial invention and is not traditional to Native culture.<sup>24</sup>  
<sup>26</sup> Its purpose is to erase the Native population by making it increasingly more difficult to identify as Native.

#### EDUCATOR TIP

When discussing identity in the classroom, embrace the idea that all people have multifaceted identities. No person is just one way, and no one should be expected to only fit into some demographic boxes and not others. When speaking with your Native students do not ask about their blood quantum.

## It Didn't End There: Historical Trauma



Major traumatic events such as slavery, genocide, and colonization affect communities for generations.<sup>11</sup> This sustained impact is called **historical trauma**. These events include mass murder, relocation, apartheid, and discrimination, and usually involve groups with a shared ethnic, national, or religious identity.

Historical trauma passes from parent to child biologically.<sup>30</sup> **Effects of historical trauma include psychosocial disorders, health problems, and lasting economic hardships.**<sup>11, 30, 19</sup> **These effects are sustained throughout a person's life and are supported through discriminatory and inequitable social and political practices.**<sup>30</sup> In the Native community, historical trauma and its effects are significant.<sup>11</sup>

Displacement and genocide of Native peoples caused massive historical trauma in Native populations, and many important knowledge keepers and their lessons were lost.<sup>3</sup> The dispossession of land has forced many Native nations to rebuild their communities in unfamiliar places, to which they are not connected. Communities often cannot grow or gather their traditional foods in these places, and are cut off from the complex economic networks they had built with other nations.<sup>19, 1</sup>

Despite this trauma, many Native nations have been able to preserve their traditional knowledge, successfully rebuild their Nations, and support the health of their people.<sup>19, 17</sup> **It will take several healthy, supported, and empowered generations to fully overcome the long-reaching impacts of historical trauma.**<sup>11</sup>

Building a healthy learning environment that empowers and recognizes the strengths of Native students is one of the best places to start.<sup>15</sup>

#### EDUCATOR TIP

When teaching subject matter that touches on historical events that may trigger traumatic responses from your students, be vigilant on how your students are responding to the material presented. If a student appears distressed, attempt to connect them with counseling and mental health services available through your school.

A well-meaning teacher once asked a student how she could be Native if she had never participated in a traditional sweat lodge ceremony before. This teacher had experience attending pow wows and felt that she knew a lot about the local Native community. The student, who was a part of the local Tribe in the area, did not know how to respond.

This student did not have had the confidence to tell the teacher that what made her Native was her family lineage. She could not explain that her people were forced to assimilate into mainstream culture or die, or that the traditional cultural leaders in her community had passed on before she was born. Not only that, but sweat lodges were not traditional to her culture at all. Without understanding the context of Native culture, this teacher was questioning the legitimacy of this student's identity.

Research shows that Native youth can gain deep value from having cultural connection with their Native community.<sup>32</sup> For youth who are not raised in a Tribal community, or whose cultural traditions may not be accessible, reconnecting with traditional culture can both empower and lead to a strong sense of identity. This empowerment has been shown to have many health benefits.<sup>11, 33</sup> Likewise, negative cultural experiences may cause youth to create distance between themselves and their identity as a Native person.<sup>34</sup> **Finding ways to positively connect with culture is essential to raising strong, healthy Native youth.**

The reasons for being disconnected from one's traditional culture are vast. It is not up to any non-Native person to judge. For example, only 3 out of 10 Native people live on their traditional homelands.<sup>2, 35</sup> Sometimes this physical distance is the result of forced government removal.<sup>31</sup> Other times, cultural distance is the result of government incentives that encourage Natives to move to cities.<sup>26</sup> An example of this is the *Indian Relocation Act of 1956*, which provided funding

## It Isn't Your Fault: Cultural Involvement



Policies of forced government removal in the United States include the *Indian Removal Act of 1830*, *California's Land Claims Act of 1851*, the *Act for the Government and Protections of Indians of 1850* (genocide and slavery), and the *Peace Policy of 1869* (boarding schools and family separation).

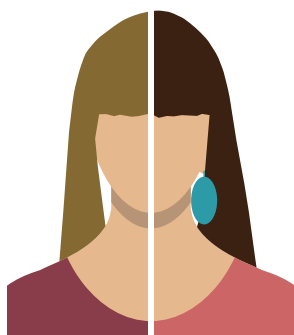
for Natives to relocate from reservations to cities and receive basic vocational training. The underlying purpose of this act was to encourage assimilation into the dominant American culture, and to create distance between Urban Natives and their traditional communities.

Either way, the level of cultural involvement a child has is not always a family's decision. Government intervention in Native communities is a major reason some Native families are not connected to their cultures or communities. **When working with Native students, remember that their level of involvement with their community does not make them less Native.**

#### EDUCATOR TIP

Ultimately, it is not up to the educator to comment or judge a student's identity. Instead, integrate opportunities for students to explore their own multifaceted identities through journal reflections, art, creative writing, etc. This allows students to define themselves rather than feeling defined by the opinion of their educator.

## Am I Real Enough? Looking Native



I learned long ago that there is not one way that Native people look. When I walk into a general council meeting for my Tribe, I am met by a diverse group of people whose eyes, hair, and skin include all colors of the rainbow. Native people, like all people, have multicultural identities that may or may not be obvious based on appearance.<sup>26</sup> While I may have tan skin, dark hair, and hazel eyes, my cousin might have dirty blonde hair and green eyes. We still share the same family lineage and are tied together by our common culture and ancestry.

In addition, Native peoples across the continent may look different from one another.<sup>36</sup> Physical appearance can differ depending on the fashion, climate, and physical needs of both the individual and community. **Few resemble the typical image of Natives presented in pop culture.**<sup>36</sup>

Some Native youth feel pride in looking like what popular culture describes as “Native.” On the other hand, Natives who do not look like what popular culture determines to be “Native” can feel insecure.<sup>7</sup>

Dressing in more traditional clothing or sporting indigenous-made jewelry may reinforce connection to one's culture.<sup>32</sup> Others may feel pressure to blend in with the dominant culture, or simply prefer wearing clothing or hairstyles that are commonly worn by other kids their age.

The pressure to prove one's identity through appearance can be challenging, especially if one does not possess the physical qualities that popular culture deems to be "Native", like long black hair.<sup>32</sup>

#### EDUCATOR TIP

Integrate a wide variety of representation from the different communities included in your curricula. The idea that people in specific demographic groups look different is an idea that applies to all groups, not just Natives. So, take care to include a wide array of images, styles, languages, etc. into your classroom. This increases the chances of students identifying with your class.<sup>4</sup>

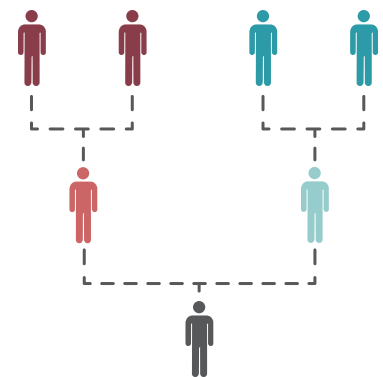
Coming from a small Tribe in California, I realize the importance of stating my Tribal affiliation when possible. Many people are unaware that there are 109 federally recognized Tribes in California alone, with many more lacking federal recognition. This is especially true when we consider all of the small Tribes that are scattered across the country. When I mention my Tribe, the Berry Creek Tyme Maidu, most people apologize for never having heard of my nation. By claiming my Tribe by name, I am often teaching non-Natives that we exist. For many Native youth belonging to small Tribes like mine, feeling a sense of erasure is common.

**Tribal affiliation refers to the primary Tribe to which a Native person belongs.**

Many Native people have connections to more than one Tribe, depending on the ancestry of their family members.<sup>37</sup>

When a person explains their Tribal affiliation, they are usually referring to the Tribe to which they are a member or citizen. The idea of membership and citizenship will be explained in the following section.

### These Are My People: Tribal Affiliation



**Although Tribes may use different terminology for Two-Spirit individuals, the concept of a single body being blessed with both a male and a female spirit has existed in many Indigenous nations for time immemorial.** The role of Two-Spirited people varies depending on traditional Tribal practices. In many Tribes, when a person claims the role of Two-Spirit they may assume integral spiritual responsibilities within their community.

### This is Who I am: Understanding the Two-Spirit Identity

It is important to note that the Two-Spirit identity is not a term referring to a gender identity (like trans-masculine or cis-feminine) or an attractive orientation (like gay or asexual) but is instead a characteristic distinct from these identifiers. Although a Two-Spirit person may be gay, being a gay Indigenous person does not necessarily mean that person is Two-Spirited.

## SECTION 1 ♦ PART 3

## We Are Where We Come From: The Nations within Our Nation

In school, students learn about the structure of the United States, including how the government is formed and how it runs. The intention in teaching students about their government is to encourage democratic participation. To be a good democratic citizen, it's important to know about the system of which you are apart.

The thing is, the United States is not the only nation that exists on this land. **To be an informed democratic citizen, we argue that all students and adults should know about the many other nations that legally exist here, alongside the United States government. These nations are Tribal nations.**

When the federal Government colonized the land now known as the United States, it found a way to expand despite the existence of Tribal communities on the same land. Knowing that Native peoples would resist moving away from the land on which they lived since time immemorial, the United States Government developed a system to remove Natives, that often resorted to brute force.<sup>31</sup> This system is still evolving today.<sup>38</sup> While educators may not need to know all the details of this system, having a general knowledge can be helpful.

### EDUCATOR TIP

Why do educators need to know the information laid out below? Aside from the reasons listed above, educators who know Native history are better equipped to teach it correctly.<sup>7</sup> Teaching Native history has the potential to help Native students feel seen, validated, and empowered to participate in their own communities.<sup>7, 4</sup> For those who don't teach history; the environmental, social, medical, psychological, and cultural impacts of the structures detailed below are well documented and can be designed to fit most school subjects.<sup>11, 32, 31</sup>

### Framing the Right to Exist: Treaties

From 1774-1870, the United States government signed 100's of treaties with Native communities.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of these treaties was to determine borders marking U.S. and Tribal territories. Like many international treaties, these agreements laid out behavior expectations between the U.S. government and Tribes. By 1871, the U.S. government ended its treaty signing process. Today, the U.S. is expected to uphold these same treaties.<sup>40</sup>



Treaties are legally binding agreements between Native peoples and the federal government.<sup>40</sup> **These agreements gave specific responsibilities to the U.S. government, which they agreed to fulfill in exchange for large swaths of Native land.**<sup>40</sup> Some responsibilities include providing healthcare and education opportunities for the displaced Native communities.

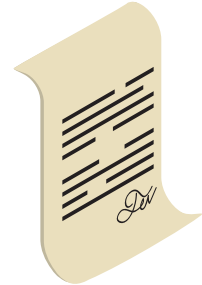
Most Native communities signed these treaties under coercive circumstances.<sup>41</sup> They were under the threat of violence or total annihilation.<sup>31</sup> Often, Native peoples lost access to their traditional homelands, and were moved to lands that were far removed and had few natural resources.<sup>42</sup>

In California, the Modoc War and removal of the Modoc people to Oklahoma is one example of forced removal.<sup>31</sup> Also in California, the 18 Unratified Treaties highlight the government's desire to move Natives to the poorest tracts of land and to keep Native people out of treaty negotiations to the extent possible.<sup>43</sup>

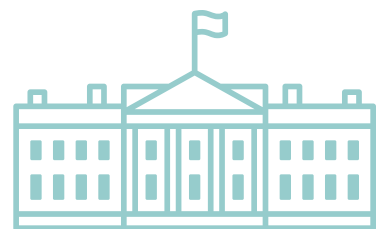
In general, the federal government has not offered the resources or support they agreed to in its treaties with Native peoples.<sup>42</sup> In many cases, the government found ways to further remove Native peoples from the land promised to them in the treaties.<sup>42</sup> Because of this legacy, many Native people feel a deep distrust of the U.S. government.<sup>41</sup>

Although Native nations possess the right to **sovereignty** (the right to govern themselves) and have been existing as sovereign Nations since time immemorial, Tribes with **federal recognition status** operate as independent governments in the eyes of the U.S. government.<sup>38</sup> Tribes gain this status through treaties, acts of Congress, or executive orders.<sup>41</sup> Currently, there are 574 federally recognized Tribes. That means there are 574 Tribal nations independently operating at this very moment. Many non-federally Recognized Tribes have state recognition, which offers a different set of protections.<sup>19</sup>

Not all Native nations are recognized by federal or state governments. California's 18 Unratified Treaties, for example, left many Tribal communities unrecognized and landless.<sup>43</sup> The California Rancheria Act of 1958 terminated the existence of many California Tribes, many of which remain unrecognized by the state and federal governments today.<sup>41</sup> Belonging to a federally recognized Tribe provides the citizens of that nation certain resources.<sup>19</sup> Unrecognized Tribes may not have access to these same resources.



## Another Hurdle: Federal Recognition



Being a citizen of a federally recognized Tribe can be empowering for Native youth. **However, in it is important to remain aware of the different resources available to students coming from federally, state, and unrecognized Native nations.**

#### EDUCATOR TIP

When teaching about Native communities, it is important to remember that the government unfairly assigns Tribal status to some groups and not others.<sup>44, 41</sup> Supporting unrecognized Tribes in their fight to gain recognition status is an important part of being an ally to Native peoples.<sup>22</sup> When teaching American history, consider the status of the Tribes you are including, and see if any are unrecognized!

## Removed by Law: Reservations and California's Rancheria System



As the United States government grew in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, **settler's** (people whose ancestors are not Indigenous to the land) desire to build cities, factories, mining centers, and more, in places long occupied by Native communities grew as well. In order to grow economically, the U.S. government developed what is known as the "reservation system."<sup>41</sup>

When Tribal treaties were signed in the 18th and 19th Centuries, many Natives were moved to the reservations and white settlers were able to claim lands once occupied by Natives.<sup>41</sup>

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 allowed the government to forcibly move all Native people from their homes to new reservations West of the Mississippi River. Many Native communities fought against this policy but were no match for the U.S. military.<sup>45</sup>

In 1887, the Dawes Act further broke apart Tribal communities. It allowed the federal government to break up reservation lands into small parcels that would be assigned to individual Native families while the enormous amount of remaining land would be offered up to white settlers.<sup>20</sup> **By separating families from their communities, Natives were expected to grow distant from their cultural traditions and assimilate into settler culture.**<sup>46</sup> With the passing of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, California's government gave funds for Native communities to buy small land parcels. These lands are called **rancherias**.

Today, Native governments can invest in housing, economic development, and community preservation on rancheria and reservation land.<sup>19, 17</sup> Rancherias are not legally different from "reservations", it is the term used in California.<sup>45</sup>

**EDUCATOR TIP**

Teaching about the reservation and rancheria system and its origins can add additional layers of complexity to lessons surrounding Western Expansion, Industrialization, the Gold Rush, Missions, and more. What is the human price of economic development? What about the cultural, or environmental cost? These questions pair nicely with this corner of Native history.

Tribal Nations are sovereign and have been operating as independent Nations since time immemorial. **When the federal government recognizes this sovereignty and labels a Tribe as "federally recognized", that Nation can form their own legislative and judicial structures, law enforcement structures, education systems, and membership requirements without disruption by the federal government.**<sup>19, 46</sup>

The United States federal government interacts with Tribal governments through a government to government relationship.<sup>38</sup> This is much like any other relationship that the United States has with a foreign country.<sup>40</sup> Questions about trade and economic partnerships are handled in negotiations, like if the United States was making a trade deal with another nation.<sup>40</sup> Because Tribal nations are sovereign, the United States government is very limited in its ability to make decisions about anything happening on Tribal land.<sup>40</sup>

Tribal nations do not pay federal taxes.<sup>47</sup> However, some might levy taxes of their own, within their territory.<sup>47</sup>

There are many loopholes that allow the United States government to interfere and engage in Tribal affairs.<sup>38</sup> Casinos and natural resource extraction are a few examples.<sup>47</sup>

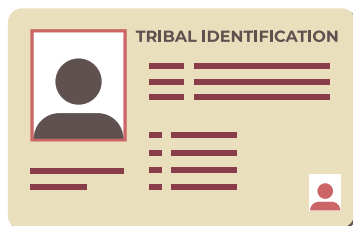
**EDUCATOR TIP**

When teaching about trade and political diplomacy, consider including the U.S. relationships with Tribal nations. These Tribal nations exist within U.S. boundaries, after all. Treating Tribal nations like any other nation strengthens the public's view of Native peoples, supporting the idea that Native people continue to exist, thrive, adapt, and express sovereignty. Also, consider including current events that include contemporary Tribal nations. An example might be the protest at Standing Rock, or the *McGirt v. Oklahoma* Supreme court case.

## International Relations within National Borders: Tribal Sovereignty



## To Be or Not to Be: Tribal Enrollment



In my wallet rests a Tribal identification card. This card has my picture, my Tribal name, my address. It is kind of like a driver's license. This card is used to prove that I am who I say I am.

Carrying this card is a small reminder that I am part of a strong Native community. Not every Native person has one of these cards. Some Tribes may not issue them, some Natives might not be eligible to receive one, depending on their Tribe's enrollment protocols.<sup>26</sup>

Tribal sovereignty gives Tribes the ability to design their own enrollment protocols.<sup>26</sup> Enrollment protocols widely differ between Tribes.<sup>26</sup> Some of the protocol may resemble:

1. *Showing a documented family lineage connecting a member to a founding member of the Tribe.*
2. *Requiring a certain percentage of Tribal blood, clearly documented (i.e. "blood quantum.")*
3. *Requiring lineage from either the father or mother's side of the family, clearly documented.*

**Enrolled members of a Tribal Nation are citizens of that nation. Because of the history of relocation, family separation, and strict membership protocols, it is possible and common for people to have Native ancestry and not be an enrolled member of a Tribe.**<sup>26, 37</sup>

Enrolled members may have greater access to public health, education, housing, economic and cultural resources than non-enrolled members.<sup>26</sup> For example, some Indian Health Centers (defined in the appendix) require proof of Tribal membership in order to receive services.<sup>48</sup>

Being enrolled in a Tribe can provide a sense of comfort and belonging for Native youth.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, not being enrolled in one's Tribe can lead to feelings of isolation, rejection, and loss of purpose, though this is not always the case.<sup>32</sup>

## SECTION 1 ♦ PART 4

# We Just Want to Help: Cultural Assumptions That Do More Harm Than Good


In the previous sections of this guide, we break down elements of Native identity. In this part, we address how these identities play out in the classroom.

Unfortunately, there are many assumptions and stereotypes targeted towards Native families.<sup>2</sup> This can make school feel unwelcoming.<sup>9</sup> **Because educators are in positions of power, it is important to double check that we do not carry these assumptions with us into our work.**

## Cultural Assumptions Tool: What My Teacher Told Me

### EDUCATOR TIP

To use this tool, read each row of the table. First, we identify a concept, accompanied by a common misconception. We then debunk the misconception. Finally, we provide a list of thoughts/saying to avoid, as they are ultimately rooted in misunderstandings and false assumptions. Notably, we do not provide alternative statements to make in place of the statements to avoid. This is because, in large part, the alternative is to simply avoid placing assumptions and stereotypes on your students and their families.

CONCEPT	MISCONCEPTION	REALITY	THINGS TO AVOID SAYING
<b>Blood Quantum</b> 	“Only full blood Natives are really Native.”	<p>Not all Natives are, or have to be, full blooded to claim a Native identity.<sup>26</sup></p> <p>Because of colonization, family separation, genocide, and assimilation, many Natives are not “full blooded.”<sup>26, 31</sup></p> <p>When someone’s identity depends on a blood measurement, it keeps the community from growing (see blood quantum definition on pg. 10). Doing this can even lead to a decrease in the Native population size.<sup>26</sup></p>	<p>“What percent are you?”</p> <p>“But are you really Native?”</p> <p>“He/She/They are real Natives.”</p>

CONCEPT	MISCONCEPTION	REALITY	THINGS TO AVOID SAYING
<p>Tribal Enrollment</p>	<p>“All Natives belong to a Tribe.”</p> <p>Or</p> <p>“Only Tribally enrolled Natives are really Native.”</p>	<p>Some Native students are enrolled in Tribal nations, some are not. Some Native students may belong to a Tribe that is federally recognized, some may not.</p> <p>Forced family separation, assimilation, and Tribal membership requirements leave some Native people without an official Tribal community.<sup>26, 24</sup> This does not take away from their ancestry or cultural heritage.</p>	<p>“What is your Tribal enrollment status?”</p> <p>“What is your membership status?”</p> <p>“Are you a Tribal member or not?”</p> <p>Note: There might be situations where you need to get this information, for paperwork or program applications. We want allies to be aware that enrollment status can be an emotional subject for Native people and to handle this with care.</p>
<p>Looking Native</p>	<p>“All Natives look the same.”</p> <p>Or</p> <p>“There is one way that Natives should look.”</p>	<p>Native people are Native because of their family history and cultural heritage. Natives today can have all types of skin tones. Like everyone else, many Natives have multicultural identities.</p>	<p>“You do [or don’t] look Native.”</p> <p>“If you’re Native, why do you look...?”</p> <p>“You don’t look Native enough.”</p>
<p>Being Traditional</p>	<p>“Natives are only legitimate if they practice Traditional customs.”</p> <p>Or</p> <p>“Assimilated Natives are not really Native.”</p>	<p>Many Native people have assimilated into mainstream culture. The Indian Boarding School system and legalization of genocide increased assimilation.<sup>31</sup></p> <p>Not all Native communities and families have access to traditional languages, homelands, or cultures.<sup>7</sup> This is not Native peoples’ fault. It is the direct result of colonization.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Judging a Native person based on their traditional knowledge and traditional practices is unfair and can be harmful to Native students.<sup>7</sup></p>	<p>“You’re Native? You must know how to...”</p> <p>“All Native people participate in ceremonies, pow wows, etc.”</p> <p>“If you don’t know your culture, then how can you be Native?”</p> <p>“You are whitewashed.”</p>

You might be thinking, “I don’t think I say these things to Native people anyways,” or “I would never say these things to someone’s face,” or “What’s the big deal?” Nearly every Native student will hear or has heard these statements directed at them before.<sup>9</sup> When Native people have their identities unfairly judged by non-Native people, it can have negative impacts on their self-esteem and ability to trust non-Natives.<sup>9, 32, 8, 10</sup>

## Why is this important?

Humanities teachers may be familiar with many of the common stereotypes and tropes found in art, literature, film, poetry, etc. **But stereotypes of Native peoples extend beyond the English or History classroom into the Science classroom as well.**<sup>37</sup> Below are some of the common tropes and stereotypes to be aware of when teaching about Native peoples.

## Not Your Average Indian: Stereotypes We’ve Grown Up With

### EDUCATOR TIP

Once you begin to notice these tropes and stereotypes in everyday lesson materials, consider ways to debunk the stereotypes or integrate positive examples of Native people that fit none of these stereotypes, so that your students gain a more accurate understanding of Native peoples.

### COMMON NATIVE TROPES AND STEREOTYPES

<b>Victim</b>	Shows Natives only as passive, with no agency or skills needed to protect or take care of themselves.  Examples: Keep America Beautiful: the Crying Indian Campaign
<b>Primitive</b>	Portrays Native cultures as simple and ignorant. Suggests Native people lack knowledge, values, or morality.  Examples: The Florentine Codex, which was used as a primary source to justify the enslavement of Native peoples.
<b>Noble Savage</b>	Depicts Natives as outsiders, untouched by the negative aspects of “civilization”.  The Noble Savage is uninterested in material things and is honorable and brave in their actions. Nonetheless, the Noble Savage will never fit into mainstream society.  Examples: John the savage in <i>Brave New World</i> , Tonto in <i>The Lone Ranger</i>
<b>Warrior</b>	Depicts Natives as fierce warriors or “braves”. This often appears as sports team names or mascots. Historically this has also been used to paint natives as brutal savages with a lust for blood and violently obtained trophies e.g. scalps.  Examples: Kocoum from <i>Pocahontas</i>

### COMMON NATIVE TROPES AND STEREOTYPES

<b>Stoic</b>	<p>Suggests Natives are quiet, brooding people who rarely show emotions. Stoic Natives might speak only in short metaphorical or wise phrases.</p> <p>Examples: The characterization of Sitting Bull, photographic portraits taken by Edward Curtis and other 19th Century photographers.</p>
<b>Mystic</b>	<p>Shows Natives as having innate spiritual/magical powers. Images might include Natives in traditional clothes, having power over animals or nature.</p> <p>Examples: Grandmother Willow in Disney's <i>Pocahontas</i>, stories in which Natives go on vision quests, Jacob Black in <i>Twilight</i>.</p>
<b>Dead/Erased</b>	<p>The notion that Native people no longer exist in modern culture because all of them have been displaced or killed. This is most commonly seen in History class, where Natives are only referred to in the past tense.</p> <p>In art and literature, the deceased Native people may come back to haunt the living.</p> <p>Examples: Native ghosts seen in <i>Poltergeist</i>.</p>
<b>Indian Princess or Indian Female Ally</b>	<p>The sexualization of Native women. In film a common representation is “the Chief’s daughter” who is “rescued” by the white protagonist.</p> <p>This stereotype is especially harmful given that 1 in 3 Native women will be raped in their lifetime.<sup>49</sup> Over 80% of survivors report a non-native perpetrator.<sup>49</sup></p> <p>Examples: Pocahontas, Tiger Lily in <i>Peter Pan</i>, Land o’ Lakes girl (since changed), the prevalence of sexy Native American Halloween costumes.</p>
<b>Aggressive Drunk</b>	<p>Shows Natives as being aggressive drunks. This is especially common in the way natives are portrayed in TV and movies.</p> <p>Examples: Injun Joe in <i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i>.</p>
<b>Loyal sidekick</b>	<p>Depicts Natives as a subservient sidekick to the white hero.</p> <p>Examples: Tonto in <i>The Lone Ranger</i>.</p>

### We’ve Heard it All Before: More Assumptions

As a continuation of the table above, we’ve included three statements that many Natives have been told by non-Natives. In my own teaching experience, I have had to politely correct my own colleagues when they used these statements to brush off or belittle a Native person’s experience. Below each statement, we explain the inaccuracies in the assumption, and provide correct information.



**EVERY NATIVE HAS A CASINO.**

While some California Tribes own casinos, many do not.<sup>19</sup> For Tribes that do, many use the profits to fund projects that support their Tribal members.<sup>19</sup> To assume that all Native students “have casinos”, or that they all personally profit from them is an incorrect assumption that could have a harmful impact on students' mental health and academic engagement.<sup>9</sup>

**EVERY NATIVE RECEIVES EXTRA BENEFITS.****COLLEGE**

With only 1% of undergraduate students identifying as Native, Native people are the most underrepresented group in higher education.<sup>50</sup> Some Tribal communities invest economic resources into education funds for members. However, not all Tribes have the financial ability to do this, and some do not invest their money in this way.<sup>19</sup>

Native students may also apply for Native-specific scholarships from the federal government or other sources.<sup>51, 52</sup> These are earned funds and are not rewarded to every Native student who goes to college.

**GOVERNMENT WELFARE**

Native people may apply for government welfare services, just like other people.<sup>53</sup>

Tribal governments may have their own support programs.<sup>54</sup> Some Native organizations are funded by the government, and these organizations might help with housing, food costs, or parenting support.

**HEALTH CARE**

Treaty responsibilities (see page 15) require the federal government to provide healthcare services to Native communities across the country. Remember Native people were coerced to give up their land by the U.S. government, in exchange for services such as healthcare. This is in no way freely given and, in fact, many Indian Health Service facilities are woefully underfunded and cannot meet all the health needs of the community.<sup>19</sup>

**NATIVES ARE ANTI-SCIENCE.**

California Natives have a deep knowledge of the land based on years of careful observation and experimentation.<sup>24</sup> They developed knowledge-systems in the fields of medicine, agriculture, botany, engineering, and more.<sup>23, 24</sup>

Many Native people also choose to take part in western research and education, gaining PhDs and high-level positions in research institutions.<sup>50</sup>

Just like many other Americans, Native people may qualify for reduced health care rates depending on their income. Tribal nations can also offer their own healthcare to members [19]. This has led to the creation of Tribal-run health care systems that only serve Native people, in a culturally responsive way.<sup>48</sup>

**PER CAPITA**

Some Native governments provide per capita income payments to their citizens.<sup>26, 19</sup> This money comes directly from the profits earned from Tribally owned economic entities.<sup>26, 19</sup> Tribal nations have their own age requirements and per capita amounts they provide.<sup>26</sup> Many (perhaps most) nations do not provide per capita at all.<sup>24</sup> It is inappropriate to assume that any Native person receives free money from their Tribes.

**REPARATIONS**

Many assume that the U.S. government supports Native people financially as a form of reparation, or some sort of payback for colonialism.<sup>24</sup> No Native reparations system exists in the United States.

Some may argue that treaty signing is a form of reparations. Treaties are a government to government contract between Native people and the U.S. government.<sup>40</sup> Most treaties were broken by the U.S. government.<sup>39</sup> This led to the seizure of land from Native people.<sup>31</sup> As such, treaties are in no way a form of apology for colonization.

So, you have made some of these assumptions before. Now what? There isn't a quick fix. Understanding and overcoming assumptions takes commitment to unlearning. Luckily, reading this section is the first step in developing a stronger awareness of these stereotypes. With this awareness, educators can start to gently correct inaccurate understandings, and help educate others.

## This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, typical of notebook or school paper. The background is white, and there are no margins, text, or other markings present.

## SECTION 2

## Teaching Blindfolded: Deficit Thinking in Schools

The following section provides a strength-based framework for educators to use when working with Native students and families.<sup>57, 16</sup> This framework is helpful for working with all students, not just Native students. **The reflection table tool is aimed at helping you consider your students' needs and strengths in a different way and may guide you towards helpful changes that improve your classroom management, curricula, and family communication.**<sup>16</sup>

When reviewing an early draft of this guide, we met with a group of Native elders to hear about their experiences in school. We talked about some of the most common assumptions that educators place upon Native students and families. One elder hypothesized that the disconnect between non-Native educators and Native families is rooted in a cultural difference in how education is approached.

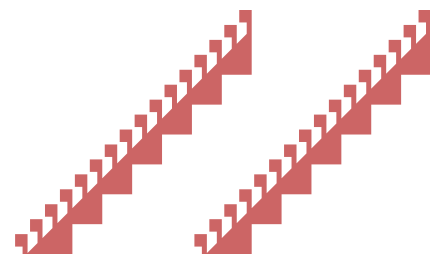
**While dominant culture expects most education to occur inside the classroom, for many Native families, learning that happens outside of the school walls is equally, if not more important.**<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, Native children learn by working alongside their elders and mentors, by listening to stories, by attending cultural events, and by being an active member in their Tribal government or community.<sup>4</sup> **Elders at this meeting expressed to us concern that Native students were judged as unintelligent or uninterested in school, even though they were considered to be future leaders in their home communities.**

It should be clarified that not all Native students come from a family that prioritizes the traditional learning described above. For those that do, being the subject of scrutiny is common.

Interestingly, one elder described a scenario that I knew all too well from my own teaching. She told the story of a Native student who often arrived at school tired, and who was generally uninterested in the typical lecture style of teaching used in class. When the teacher met with the student's family, the teacher realized that the student was tired because they were attending important cultural events every day after school. The student was a mentor for younger Native students at the Native after school program. This student was a traditional dancer, spoke in their Traditional language, and spent weekends performing alongside their family members. They were the opposite of disengaged.



**"Traditionally, Native children learn by working alongside their elders and mentors, by listening to stories, by attending cultural events, and by being an active member in their Tribal government or community."**



## SECTION 2 ♦ PART 1

## Seeing Strengths: Shifting Our Approach



**" Rather than jump to conclusions about the moral character of a student, we must ask questions, reflect on our own practice, and be curious about how to incorporate a student's strengths into their learning."**

What can we as teachers do with this information? First, we can reflect on our own assumptions about what it means to be "smart" or to "have good values". We can reconsider what it means to be a "leader" and how think about how our definition might differ between ourselves and our students. In some cases, a student's intelligence and values might really stand out in a setting that is separate from school.<sup>16</sup> Second, we can use our new insight to find ways to engage our students in a way that embraces their family's' values. **Can we create space for students to include the knowledge they are learning outside of school into their classwork in some way?**

As educators, we are often overworked, tired, and pushed beyond capacity.<sup>55</sup> This is not an excuse for falling into a deficit approach to working with students. It is often easier to blame poor behavior or performance on a character flaw or moral deficit than to further tax ourselves as teachers to fully investigate a student's misbehavior.<sup>56</sup> Native families and students commonly experience this in schools.<sup>8</sup> **Rather than jump to conclusions about the moral character of a student, we must ask questions, reflect on our own practice, and be curious about how to incorporate a student's strengths into their learning.**

Based on conversations with many Native families, we have compiled a list of common deficit minded statements that are directed at Native students and families in school. We've provided alternative ways of approaching each challenge, as well as some reflection questions for educators to answer when considering making improvements to their practice.

## Shifting Our Approach Reflection Tool

### Deficit Based Mindset (Fixed, focuses on weaknesses)

"That kid isn't very bright."

OR

"Some kids just aren't cut out for school."

### Strengths Based Mindset (Growth, focuses on strengths and potential)

Maybe this student needs the information presented in a different way.

AND

All students can learn with the right approach and support in place.

### Self-Reflection

Use these questions to help you stay grounded in a strengths-based mindset.

What does this student do well? How can I highlight this regularly?

Can I differentiate my lessons more?

Can I provide more scaffolds for this student?

Can I include students' interests in my lessons?

Can I add a different kind of assessment to better understand this student's needs?

Can I reteach material?

Can I get this student extra academic support?

"He or she is just a bad kid."

OR

"Nothing seems to work with this student."

This student has a need that is not currently being addressed.

AND

We haven't discovered what works for this student yet.

Can I use strategies to deescalate student behavior?

Are my rules practical, and do students understand why they are in place?

Can I create positive behavior incentives that celebrate the student's strengths?

Am I finding ways to provide more positive feedback than negative?

Does student behavior and performance improve as a result of my consequences?

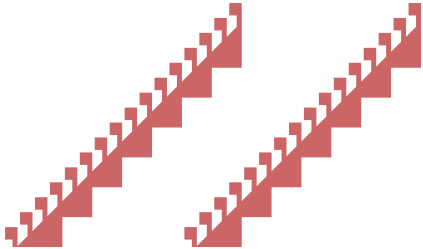
### If not:

Can I connect students to their personal and cultural values through my consequences?

What other stakeholders in this student's life can I involve?

Can I include this student in creating goals and reward systems?

Can I find a job or role in the classroom that will help this student feel like they belong?



Deficit Based Mindset <i>(Fixed, focuses on weaknesses)</i>	Strengths Based Mindset <i>(Growth, focuses on strengths and potential)</i>	Self-Reflection <i>Use these questions to help you stay grounded in a strengths-based mindset.</i>
“That family doesn’t have good values.”  OR  “That family cannot take care of its kids.”  OR  “This family isn’t invested in their child’s education.”	Every family has unique values that inform the way they raise their child and interact with the school.  AND  This family can use extra care and support to help them be successful.  AND  Every family has different cultural norms around school.  Every family has different obligations that can impact their ability to be in contact with the school.	Can I ask about this family’s goals and values? Do I know what they want for their child and their education?  Can I bring these goals and values into the classroom?  What positive adult role models can connect this student to their values?  Can I ask what this family wants out of a school environment?  How can we help connect this family with the resources it needs to be successful?  What strengths does this family have?  Do I know this family’s cultural values and norms around school?  How can I work with a family’s schedule to help them become more engaged in their child’s education?

Teachers who come to school each day with a strengths-based mindset can help create a more open, trusting, and communicative classroom culture.<sup>61</sup> Studies show that focusing on strengths first can increase buy-in and trust.<sup>16</sup> Shifting our thinking can actually rewire our brains out of the negativity bias that so often dooms us to failure and keeps us from seeing the strengths in our students and families.<sup>62</sup>

## Reflection Notes

[illegible]



## SECTION 3

# Upgrading Your Educator Toolbox

The following section provides three separate sets of suggestions that school leaders, classroom teachers, and special education departments can use to better serve their Native families.

While the suggestions here are provided with the needs of Native students and families in mind, many of them can be applied to working with other student groups.

*\*Note\* The term "Native knowledge" is used to refer to traditional knowledge passed down through Native communities, spanning all fields of study.*

### EDUCATOR TIP

One suggestion for using these tools is to highlight or check the suggestions that are already in place at your school or in your classroom. Give yourself credit for what you already do! Then, circle the suggestions you are interested in implementing or introducing to your colleagues. There are many suggestions here, and it is not expected that an educator be able to implement them all at once. Instead, identify the ones you think are more easily implementable, and start there.

## SECTION 3 ♦ PART 1

# Being Open to Feedback: Seeing Allyship Opportunities

I once met a teacher who was building a unit on Native land stewardship practices. She was non-Native and unfamiliar with Native cultures and practices, and so she invited me to a meeting to review her work.

As we talked, it became clear the teacher had little background knowledge about Native culture or communities. In fact, she had not reached out to any Tribes in the area and had not considered doing so before our meeting. This immediately concerned me.

We chatted a bit about the basics of Tribal government and Native culture. She realized that her unit lacked accurate, current Native representation. I shared the locations and contact person for each of the Native cultural centers in our city. I was happy to help but wasn't sure if this teacher would actually follow through with my contacts.





A few months later I ran into the same teacher at one of the local Native cultural centers. She was conversing with the director of the center like they were old friends and knew everyone there by name.

I walked up to the teacher, inspired that she took time and effort to learn and make connections with the local Native community. She told me that she had taken my advice and met with the community center director the day after we met. The director was excited about the project and introduced her to local Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) practitioners from a Tribe in the area. This connection led to further meetings, collaborations, and relationships. **This left the teacher connected to a wide network of Native peoples in the area who supported, contributed to, and celebrated the project.** In the end, she became a trusted ally and partner to Native peoples.

The teacher in this story practiced allyship in a number of ways. With her story as an example, here are some suggestions for how educators can be stronger allies to Native people:

1. Invite Native people into conversations and projects that involve Native knowledge and culture. This is especially important when projects have the potential to impact Native people in any way.
2. Practice humility and admit to knowledge gaps when seeking support.
3. If you have learned a piece of Native knowledge that the Native community is comfortable with you sharing, share what you have learned with other teachers and colleagues and invite them to continue learning more along with you.
4. Attend public events at Native cultural centers and learning institutions.
5. Build personal relationships with representatives of the Native community.

The road to becoming a better ally can feel scary. The stakes seem high, and nobody wants to mess up. **It is important to remember that allyship does require an open mind and a willingness to take risks.** Teachers who make this effort will reap positive rewards that will undoubtedly shift the classroom culture for the better.<sup>7</sup>

#### SHARING

There are many aspects of Native knowledge which are sacred and will never be shared with a person outside of a Tribal community. If you are taught a piece of Native knowledge, it will most likely be something the Tribe is comfortable sharing. However, it is respectful and reflects positively on you if you ask permission before sharing that information with anyone outside of the Tribal community.



SECTION 3 ♦ PART 2

# Building Supportive School Structures

## *For School Leaders*

Administrators and school leaders set the tone for school culture and help build bridges between students, families, and community stakeholders.

The suggestions below are ways that school leaders can improve school culture for Native youth. Each suggestion is given in the hopes of promoting open dialogue that builds trust, cultural awareness, and respect between schools and Native families. Suggestions are drawn from a body of research, conversations with students and families, and personal teaching experience.<sup>63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68</sup>

### Strategy 1

#### Create opportunities for Native students to strengthen identity.

**CONTEXT 1**

**Native students may not feel comfortable discussing their cultural identities publicly.**

Major traumatic movements like the Indian boarding school system, legal genocide by the state government, and forced assimilation may leave some Native students hesitant to talk about their home cultures.<sup>11, 32, 10, 14</sup> Many Native families protect cultural knowledge by keeping information within the family or Tribal community. These things combined can increase feelings of isolation on campus.<sup>25</sup> Finding ways to support and celebrate Native students can help them grow pride, strength, and a sense of security on campus, all of which may support student engagement.<sup>16</sup>

SUGGESTION	DESCRIPTION
Support district Indian Education programs. Connect Native students with these programs when possible.	Title VI grants provide resources for Indian Education programs across the state of California. These programs aim to help connect Native students with their cultures and create a bridge between Native families and public schools. Many Indian Education programs organize cultural events, offer tutoring services, and some connect Native families with essential services like food pantries. Connect Native students with these and attend cultural events hosted by these programs when possible!
Create Native student centers or clubs (this is particularly relevant at the High School level).	This is similar to a Black Student Union, where Native students can connect with other Natives in a space that feels comfortable.

**SUGGESTION****DESCRIPTION**

**Find opportunities to celebrate Native culture and knowledge on a school wide level (i.e. Indigenous Peoples' Day celebration, Native plant garden).**

California officially replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day in 2019. Schools can choose to celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day by reading work by a Native author, learning about local Native peoples and history, organize a fundraiser to support Native initiatives, debunk Native stereotypes and misconceptions, learning about the Native experience of colonization, and more. The key to doing this well is putting Native voices first, allowing Native people to tell their own stories.

**Celebrate and highlight local Native alumni and cultural figures.**

Some schools have local Native artists lead students through art, mural, garden, or activism projects. Other ideas include inviting Native alumni to the school to present their work to either classes, parents, or for a community event. Schools might also undergo a Native cultural project where students study historical and contemporary Native figures, focusing on the strengths of the Native community.





# Strategy 2

## Invest in staff development.

### CONTEXT 2

**Native educators make up a small minority of educators in general.<sup>50</sup> This means that most educators are likely unfamiliar with many parts of Native life, community structure, and culture.**

Native students and families are aware that their teachers may not understand them.<sup>7</sup> Some may assume that their teachers are uninterested in learning about them at all. Remember, Native peoples have been on the losing end of aggressive and violent policies since the moment of European contact.<sup>31</sup> Distrust for the public school system is just one consequence of these experiences.<sup>11</sup> In order to build trust, educators can invest time and resources into learning about the Native communities they serve.

### SUGGESTION

### DESCRIPTION

**Invest in professional cultural competency training for staff. Acknowledge and avoid situations where the workload of Native staff is increased in order for them to educate other staff members.**

Investing in professional development from trusted cultural leaders shows dedication to making school more equitable for all. Remember not to expect Native teachers to take on the responsibility of educating fellow staff and faculty members, in addition to their current commitments to their students. As mentioned earlier, not all Native people are the same, and not all Native people are closely tied to their cultures. Avoid assuming that the few Native people on your staff are willing to train faculty, and consider bringing in an outside trainer.

**Recognize and reward staff efforts to make positive changes. Celebrate this hard work publicly.**

Start professional meetings with “shout outs” so that colleagues can recognize one another’s growth and effort. Make space to display classwork and project around campus, feature work on the school website and newsletters.

**Take time for staff to reflect on their own cultures. Consider how teacher’s home cultures impact their teaching.**

Every family has different expectations for their children in school. There is not one way to approach school, and there is not one “right” set of values. Making sure staff understand the values that they were raised with, and how those values impact their approach to teaching, classroom management, discipline, etc. helps educators stay open minded and curious about the norms with which their students were raised.<sup>8</sup>



SUGGESTION	DESCRIPTION
Create opportunities for Native scholars, leaders, and cultural knowledge bearers to present and train faculty on issues related to Native culture, identity, education, politics, etc.	Ask local Native Tribes if they have education representatives who do cultural competency trainings. Reach out to local cultural centers and ask about field trips and teacher training around historical and cultural movements. Remember, asking teachers to understand how to teach something without any training is setting them up for failure.
Recruit and retain Native faculty and staff. Reflect on the retention of Native staff, and the school cultural barriers that may impact staff success.	Reach out to Native Studies departments, local Tribal offices, and Native professional networks and online communities about job openings at your school site. Reflect on how equity plays into the school’s work culture.



# Strategy 3

## Engage with the broader Native community.

### CONTEXT 3

**For some Native students, their home lives and school lives can feel culturally incompatible.<sup>10</sup>**

To increase engagement and Native student buy-in, schools can engage and include the broader Native community. Doing so communicates respect, willingness to listen and learn, and desire to build trust.<sup>4</sup> It also communicates to students they have adults who have their best interest in mind, an important factor in supporting our Native student's health.<sup>32</sup>

### SUGGESTION

### DESCRIPTION

**Introduce yourself to Education Support staff at local Tribal offices.**

Most Tribes have an Education Support office, with staff members who connect Native kids with education related opportunities. For example the Education Support office might connect students with scholarships, internship opportunities, supplementary learning, school supplies, and more. Sometimes this staff attends important school meetings and presentations. Having a relationship with this staff helps kids understand that they have a community of adults who support them.<sup>57</sup>

**Support the formation of a Native Parent Association or Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) at your school or in your district.**

Parent involvement in education is connected with positive outcomes.<sup>70</sup> PACs may advocate for changes in the school that reflect the group's common or shared cultural values. They even have the power to influence school district policies. Administrators may choose to ask for feedback from a PAC when reviewing a specific program or policy.

**Invest in Native advisors, cultural liaisons between Tribes and the school community.**

Many Tribes have cultural representatives who may be experts in a range of topics from culture, language, traditional ecological knowledge, to social work, and Native economic projects. There are also a wide range of organizations and nonprofits that represent Native communities. Reaching out to these organization for advice or feedback is a great way to build a trusting relationship with Native people. Especially when choosing to teach about Native culture or history, it is important to reach out to cultural advisors.<sup>4</sup>



SUGGESTION	DESCRIPTION
Visit local Tribal communities, museums, and resource centers to build relationships.	<p>Most counties have Native cultural centers of some sort that offer after school programs, cultural classes, and learning opportunities for the public. Native museums may also provide events and other learning opportunities. Some are willing to connect teachers with the materials they need to accurately teach about Native culture and history. These institutions may range from the Tribal level, to the state, or even the federal level. Some examples are the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center (small scale), the Autry Museum of the American West (mid-sized, includes multiple cultures), and the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (large scale).</p> <p>Website Links</p> <p>California Indian Museum and Cultural Center <a href="https://cimcc.org">https://cimcc.org</a></p> <p>Autry Museum of the American West <a href="https://theautry.org">https://theautry.org</a></p> <p>Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian <a href="https://americanindian.si.edu">https://americanindian.si.edu</a></p>
Work with Native communities to offer internships and volunteer hours at Tribal institutions.	<p>Some Tribal offices offer internships for high school and university level students.</p>
Host Native led cultural events on campus.	<p>Some schools open their doors to communities who wish to host outside events. For example, Stanford University hosts a pow wow along with the local Native community each year.</p>



## SECTION 3 ♦ PART 3

# Building Supportive Classrooms

## For Teachers

When educators celebrate students' strengths, students show increased growth, and not just in core subjects.<sup>4, 57</sup> Students may also gain confidence, and may be willing to take more risks.<sup>4</sup> This idea also applies to celebrating the strengths and unique perspectives of different cultures. For all students, learning about other cultures builds empathy and communication skills.<sup>71</sup>

Each suggestion listed below is a concrete step that teachers can try that may improve morale, engagement, and make teacher-student relationships more meaningful.<sup>3, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68</sup>

*\*Note\* The term "Native knowledge" is used to refer to traditional knowledge passed down through Native communities, spanning all fields of study.*

## Strategy 1

### Affirm Native knowledge.

#### CONTEXT 1

**Many think, sometimes unconsciously, that Native knowledge is less advanced or less useful than Western knowledge.<sup>24</sup> This might keep teachers from teaching Native culture in a significant way.<sup>8</sup>**

Contrary to what people might believe, Native culture is just as advanced in the sciences and humanities as any other culture.<sup>24</sup> Characterizing Native culture or knowledge as advanced, useful, and worthy of respect helps buck stereotypes and assumptions.<sup>24</sup> It also may improve engagement in all students and help them understand how to solve real world problems in the place where they live, using strategies they may not have been introduced to in a traditional curriculum.<sup>8</sup>

#### SUGGESTION

#### DESCRIPTION

**Include relevant Native knowledge into all class subjects, not just History class.**

There are countless ways to include Native knowledge into the classroom. Here are just a few ideas:

- Integrate Native knowledge around fire, land and water management, and biodiversity into Science class.
- Use Native stories to explain scientific phenomena, community values, and historical movements.
- Include Native authors and artists into English Language Arts class. Explore historical movements, identity, culture, values, and more.
- Explore current and historical events around Native rights and sovereignty. Compare the structure of the U.S. government to the structures of Native



**SUGGESTION****DESCRIPTION**

	<p>governments (i.e.. the Iroquois Confederacy)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Integrate traditional language words into lessons about Native knowledge.</li><li>• Look at examples of rebellion across Indian County, like the Red Power Movement, or the Kumeyaay rebellion against the California mission system.</li><li>• Compare the health impacts of Indigenous foods and non-Indigenous foods on the body.</li><li>• Compare the impact of Indigenous foods and non-Indigenous foods on the local ecosystem.</li></ul>
<p>Explore actual case studies in which Native knowledge is/was helpful in solving problems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fire management in California.</li><li>• Salmon watershed restoration.</li><li>• Supporting and maintaining biodiversity with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).</li><li>• Native foods and nutrition.</li><li>• Invasive species mitigation.</li></ul>
<p>Challenge deficit-based teaching by celebrating strengths of Native people in public ways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach the successes of the Red Power Movement of the 60's and 70's.</li><li>• Teach the ways that Native peoples resisted colonialism during the Mission Period, Gold Rush, and Western Expansion.</li><li>• Read about the court cases fought by Native peoples to expand their rights.</li></ul>
<p>Explore why the dominant narrative exists with students, as well as alternative possibilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examine the impact of Native stereotypes, and how to subvert them.</li><li>• Examine specific legislation that led to violence against Native People (i.e.. the Act for the Protection and Governance of Indians), and discuss ways that Native people can achieve a sense of justice.</li><li>• Examine the true story of Thanksgiving, Columbus, the Gold Rush, etc.</li><li>• Look at the values behind colonization and Western Expansion.</li></ul>
<p>Use place-based, local information in lessons to improve awareness of local issues and the local Native community.</p>	<p>When teaching about ecological systems, focus on your local ecosystem, and learn about what local Tribal communities do, and have done, to protect biodiversity. When teaching about a historical injustice, explore what local people did to stand up for themselves and others. Using local information makes the lessons feel more relevant to students' lives and can impact the way they interact with their communities.<sup>72</sup></p>



## Strategy 2

### Use teaching and planning strategies that support relationship building and connect students with their values.

#### CONTEXT 2

Lessons that place the teacher in the center can feel unhelpful or impractical.<sup>4</sup> This feeling can lead to problems with behavior and engagement.<sup>4</sup>

Some common Native cultural values include community, reciprocity, respect, and intergenerational education.<sup>4</sup> Instead of focusing lessons on the teacher, embracing collaboration, hands on learning, and experimentation may be a better fit and more aligned with traditional values.<sup>4</sup>

#### SUGGESTION

#### DESCRIPTION

Embrace small groups, talking circles, and collaborative learning that encourages dialogue as a replacement to lecturing.

Build in time for students to share personal stories with their peers and for you and your Native students to get to know one another. Create lessons where students must compare evidence and make conclusions together. Create group roles for students so that everyone has an important job in their groups. When there is a conflict in class, facilitate a restorative circle. Together, write and sign a class contract that is based on class values, not class rules. Revisit your class values often.

Plan lessons with Tribal preferences in mind. Once trusting relationships with local Tribes are established, ask for support and guidance as to what cultural norms and information Tribes would like included in your curricula.

Many Tribal communities would generally frown upon the use of cultural songs in the classroom, especially if taught by a non-Native teacher.<sup>4</sup> Tribal communities may have other opinions of how they would like their culture and history to be represented in the classroom. Finding out this information before teaching can give teachers peace of mind and may lead to helpful learning opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

When possible, incorporate off-campus and land-based learning. (i.e. case studies that have students observing scientific phenomena in a natural space.)

When teaching about ecosystem biodiversity, visit a local park to identify Indigenous versus introduced plants. Ask a Native facilitator to guide students through the field trip. When learning about fire science, take students outside to identify fire-safe natural spaces versus hazardous ones. This reinforces students' relationship with their local environment and can help them develop respect.<sup>72</sup>



SUGGESTION	DESCRIPTION
Invite local Native volunteers, guest speakers, and elders into the classroom.	Many communities have Native people who can be hired to visit classrooms and share stories, talk about traditional practices, etc. Bringing in elders to share their stories about the Red Power Movement, or sharing traditional food recipes such as acorn bread, can make history or science lessons come to life. Having Native representatives from a variety of fields, like authors, politicians, scientists, and artists, can help Native students feel seen by their own class community. <sup>57</sup> It also normalizes the idea that Native people exist and are successful members of society.
Embrace Native values around respect for elders and reciprocity.	Ask students to reflect on the role that mentors, and older family members have in their lives. Ask students about lessons they have learned from these people.
When possible, incorporate off-campus and land-based learning. (i.e. case studies that have students observing scientific phenomena in a natural space.)	When teaching about ecosystem biodiversity, visit a local park to identify Indigenous versus introduced plants. Ask a Native facilitator to guide students through the field trip. When learning about fire science, take students outside to identify fire-safe natural spaces versus hazardous ones. This reinforces students' relationship with their local environment and can help them develop respect. <sup>72</sup>
Emphasize the importance of observation, experimentation, and practice, with adults serving as mentors.	Many Native students learn skills and lessons by observing mentors and elders. <sup>4</sup> Be sure to model lessons for students, and emphasize the importance of “practice makes perfect,” as opposed to pressuring students to perform perfectly and memorize every piece of information. This may help students feel confident taking risks. <sup>4</sup>



## Strategy 3

### Incorporate culturally relevant assessments.

#### CONTEXT 3

**Ommiting culture from the classroom may isolate students or lead to diengagement.<sup>4</sup>**

Cultural traditions help children learn lessons about patience, understand how their world came to be, reflect on their community values, assess the role of spirituality in life, and consider how to take care of the land.<sup>4</sup> Native communities preserve cultural history, knowledge, and language through storytelling and oral history.<sup>3</sup> Communities also connect and learn from one another through the art of storytelling, basket weaving, cooking, hunting, singing, dancing, beading, and more. Integrating artistic expression in the classroom may align with students' home cultures better than traditional assessments.<sup>4</sup> Highlighting one's learning through a variety of mediums challenges all students to internalize and interpret information in a way that makes sense for them.<sup>73</sup> Sharing these expressions of learning can help build community and fosters a creative imagination.<sup>74</sup>

#### SUGGESTION

#### DESCRIPTION

**Provide arts-based and hands-on options for students to show understanding.**

Rather than simply writing an essay, include mind map assignments, visual essays, digital storytelling, and opportunities for students to integrate their cultural traditions, such as beading, dancing, weaving, and oral storytelling into their assignments. You might have students pair an artistic expression of learning with a more traditional assessment. This type of assessment may actually be more thorough, as teachers can see student understanding from multiple angles.<sup>74</sup>

**Use stories from Native and other oral traditions in order to explain ideas and phenomena.**

Ask students to explain the origin of scientific phenomena using metaphors, poems, and stories. Compare the textbook explanation of scientific phenomena to the traditional story version. Examine the ways that non-Western cultures talk about science. This idea can be repeated in English class when comparing the teaching of values across cultures, or in history class by examining multiple perspectives of the same historical event.

**Create opportunities for students to interview elders in their communities and tell those stories. Allow students to tell their own stories.**

Ask students to interview elders about their memories of a historical event or time period. Ask students to interview elders about values, relationships, politics, food, culture, etc. This helps ground students in their own values and identities and encourages cross-generational learning.<sup>4</sup>



## Strategy 4

### Embrace contemporary Native existence.

#### CONTEXT 4

**Contemporary Native culture is often missing from school curriculums.<sup>5</sup> This hurts the self-esteem, mental and emotional health, cultural connection, and community pride of Native students and families.<sup>9, 10, 5</sup>**

Many people are unfamiliar with contemporary Native culture.<sup>24</sup> In fact, students often learn about Native people in the past tense.<sup>21</sup> Most Americans know nothing about Native government structures, economies, and environmental projects.<sup>21, 2, 24</sup> What students do learn is usually from a non-Native perspective.<sup>21</sup>

Including modern examples of Native cultures from the Native perspective empowers Native students to engage in their communities with pride, and also improves relationships between Natives and non-Natives.<sup>75</sup>

#### SUGGESTION

#### DESCRIPTION

**Teach students about the location, language, government structures, and projects of local Native peoples today.**

Follow up U.S. history lessons about Native people by teaching about those same Native people today. Integrate traditional language words into the classroom. For example, when teaching geography, try to find the traditional name of different locations you introduce. When learning about inequalities in the United States, examine the rates of inequality on contemporary Tribal Nations/reservations/rancherias. When learning about climate related disasters, highlight the work of local Native people to mitigate problems.

**Incorporate Native perspectives on historical and current events.**

When teaching about the Mission system, colonialism, the Gold Rush, Western Expansion, the Civil Rights Movement, climate change, and more, include accounts from Native peoples themselves. Find sources that highlight both history and current events from the Native lens. Some topics might include political elections, climate change, food insecurity, education, etc.

**Highlight the strength and resilience of Native peoples.**

Few Native people wish to be represented as only victims of colonialism or genocide. Consider highlighting the strengths of Native peoples, like how Native people rebelled against the mission system and boarding school system, how Native people continue to fight for their treaty rights to be upheld in court, and how Native people are strengthening their local communities through cultural initiatives.

**SUGGESTION****DESCRIPTION**

**Highlight contemporary Native writers, artists, media-makers, politicians, cultural influencers, and scientists in all school subjects.**

Consider including poets and writers like Joy Harjo and Louise Erdrich into your curriculum. Research to see if any local Tribal people from your area have published works. Feature Native made documentaries and films such as those included in the American Indian Film Festival. Include research conducted by Native scientists, and Native people working at the front lines of the climate crisis.

**When speaking about Native peoples, use the present tense unless referring to a specific historical event.**

It is okay to use the past tense for events that exist in the past. For example, the Gold Rush led to the displacement of many Tribes, including Concow, Mechoopda, Nisenan, Washoe, Miwok peoples, and many more. Descendants of these Tribes continue to live and thrive, many in the same place the Gold Rush occurred. So, when referring to these Tribes, use the present tense, unless speaking about the past. When teaching about a historical time period, remind students that these people continue to exist today.



## SECTION 3 ♦ PART 4

## Keeping Us in Mind: Creating Accessibility for Natives in Special Education

At my previous school, staff approached problems with a growth mindset.

**Applying this mindset to our work required us to consider the ways our school programs, teaching pedagogy, and classroom management strategies did or did not serve our students. Not only this, but we had to be willing and eager to do what was needed to improve, without ego or defensive feelings.**<sup>57</sup> It was not always easy.

One tool for this kind of reflection is the **barrier and entry point model**. When considering the success of a program, we usually focus on the outcomes. Did this student meet their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals, for example? When we do not achieve the desired outcome, a deficit-based, or fixed mindset reaction would be to blame the student, family, teacher, or administrator.

Instead of doing this, our staff tried to understand the root of the problem by first identifying the strengths a program, educator, or student already possessed. We then identified barriers within our work that were keeping us from achieving our desired outcome. **Next, we brainstormed ways to build upon already existing strengths, and came up with ways to overcome barriers to success.** In education, strategies used to overcome barriers are often called **scaffolds**. Here, they are called **entrypoints**.

Educators are familiar with the barriers around accessibility. No two students are alike, yet we often have to teach them as if they are. These challenges can be worsened when there are cultural differences between school and students' home lives.<sup>7</sup> Here, we provide common barriers within special education (SPED). We then offer entry points to improve the accessibility of SPED programs for Native families.

In contrast to the general population, Native students between the ages of 6-21 are twice as likely to be eligible for special education services.<sup>44</sup> **This imbalance is partially the result of ongoing systemic inequalities faced by native communities. Additionally, differences in Native cultural norms and beliefs around education increase the referral rate of Native students to special education programs.**<sup>5</sup>

### Example:

A barrier to success for many newly immigrated non-English speaking students is that most classes are in English. Entry points for non-English speaking students might be to provide audio books in both their native language and English, to connect students with extra English tutoring services, and to provide translation dictionaries until they achieve English proficiency.

## Native over-representation in Special Education



Additionally, teacher bias may play a role since disciplinary action taken against Native students in special education programs is exceptionally disproportionate.<sup>44</sup> For instance, nearly 1 in 3 Native boys and 1 in 5 Native girls with disabilities have received out-of-school suspensions, while less than 1 in 10 of their fellow white students received the same disciplinary actions.<sup>44</sup>

### CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE MEDICAL MODEL

When working with Native families in SPED, be aware of differences in the approach to special education from Western and Native perspectives. The Western approach breaks health challenges into different, separate categories.<sup>44</sup>

**Most Native approaches think about how emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical health overlap.**<sup>4</sup> When creating goals for IEP's, research has shown the benefit of including a family's cultural approach to health into their plan.<sup>44</sup>

## Natives in Special Education Barrier and Entry Point Table

To use the table below, first read the barrier in the far-left column. These barriers are specific to Native families but may also apply to non-Native students. Next, dig deeper by asking yourself the questions listed in the center column. These questions are meant to give educators a fuller understanding of the context in which your students' families live. Lastly, consider the suggestions provided in the entry points column on the right. These are just some possible ways to support families based on research, parental feedback, and personal teaching experience.<sup>44, 76</sup> There are many more not listed.

### Barriers

### Entry Point

**SPED processes are not accessible to many Native families.**<sup>58</sup>

#### Are your families:

- ☐ Familiar with the services and rights of children with disabilities?
- ☐ Able to understand and explain the IEP contents to others?
- ☐ Able to process the medical and legal information provided?
- ☐ Able to find and afford legal counsel if need be?

#### Your school can:

Give families a booklet or make a web page that lays out rights, procedures, and important contacts.

Ask Tribal education offices to host a SPED Info night (My Tribe does this and it's helpful!)

Provide a list of affordable legal services that serve families of students with disabilities. (The Native Disability Law Center, for example.)





## Barriers

## Entry Point

**General Education teachers may not have enough training to support Natives in SPED programs.<sup>58</sup>**

### Do your teachers:

- Know how to use SPED strategies in the general education classroom?
- Use strategies to support specific learning disabilities?
- Use disciplinary actions that make sense with a students' IEP goals/needs?
- Know how to deescalate disruptive behaviors?

### Your school can:

Provide ongoing SPED training to General Education teachers.

Use parent and student feedback to inform staff training.

Provide training on restorative practices and classroom management.

Provide training that focuses on safe deescalation techniques.

**Native families with students in SPED may feel isolated.<sup>58</sup>**

### Do your families:

- Feel singled out, or like they are ignored?
- Know who they can ask for support or help?
- Have a community of other parents?
- Have the ability to take time off work, find affordable childcare, or tap into a personal support system for help?

### Your school can:

Provide family surveys that seek to understand how parents feel about the services being provided, and how they can be improved.

Support Native PAC groups.

Encourage the creation of parent groups within the school's SPED program.

Connect families with community resource groups (hospitals often host these).

**Native families with students in SPED may feel stigmatized.<sup>58</sup>**

### Do your families:

- Lack confidence in their child's ability to succeed?
- Think their child isn't cut out for school?
- Have low academic expectations?
- Disengage during family meetings?

### Your school can:

Communicate student strengths and areas of growth to families.

Create space for students to talk about their academic and behavior goals with families.

Guide families in helping students create academic goals for themselves.

Communicate belief in students' ability to excel in academic and nonacademic areas.

Integrate "positive phone calls" into your weekly routines.

Celebrate students' growth with families and their communities.



## Barriers

**Native communities avoid becoming involved in the school.**

### Do your families:

- Feel like their culture is unwelcome at school?
- See differences in student behavior in and out of school?
- Value extracurricular activities?

## Entry Point

### Your school can:

Give a family survey that asks about family structure, culture, and discipline norms at home. Allow parents to answer personal questions in writing, over the phone, or in person.

Encourage Tribal and family mentors to attend check in and IEP meetings.

Communicate with the Education Representatives from Tribal offices.

Collaborate with Tribes to celebrate Native students' success.



[illegible]



SECTION 4

# Wrapping it All Up: It's Not Going to be Easy, But That's Okay

## Change Requires Effort: Anticipated Challenge Guidance Tool

Teachers who make changes to support Native students may face challenges. No one reading this guide is expected to know everything at once. Every piece of information a teacher learns makes a difference.

When teachers make changes, people will push back. This is normal. Many people are fearful of the unknown and are uncomfortable diving in with an open mind. Encountering pushback to one's work can be positive, as it invites educators to justify their thinking and improve their understanding of their own decisions. We realize that it can be difficult to change your curriculum, or even classroom and school norms. Yet, things that are difficult are still worth doing.

Challenge	Response
Teachers or families might think that Native knowledge is not rigorous enough to be taught in schools.	<p>Native knowledge can be used to teach standards in the following subjects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Environmental science</li><li>• Biological science</li><li>• Botany</li><li>• Engineering</li><li>• History</li><li>• Sociology</li><li>• English Language Arts</li><li>• Art, and many more.</li></ul> <p>Especially with STEM subjects, Native knowledge systems have been used for millennia to solve problems and improve lives. This knowledge helped people survive hardships, and can help us solve problems today. These knowledge systems happen to be compatible with many state and national standards lists.</p> <p>Additionally, learning can be made more rigorous by using teaching methods that are aligned with Native culture. The students can be asked to process information in multiple ways, challenging themselves to go beyond simple memorization. <sup>41</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interviews</li><li>• Collaboration</li><li>• Land based learning</li><li>• Story telling</li><li>• Community service</li></ul>
Teachers may lack the insider knowledge needed to navigate delicate Tribal politics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be aware that there are disagreements within Tribes around cultural norms, histories, and what should be shared with the Non-Native public.</li><li>• Ask for feedback from multiple people before teaching a concept or piece of Native Knowledge.</li><li>• When inviting guests to the classroom, do your research to make sure they are the best fit for the audience.</li></ul>

**Challenge**

Teachers may feel pressure to only teach the standards.

**Response**

Many of the **Common Core's** reading and writing analysis standards can be met teaching any content subject, such as:

- Source analysis
- Author's style, intent, and structure
- Narrative, analytical, expository, persuasive, and argumentative writing

The **NGSS standards** focus on a range of modeling, observation, and analysis standards that overlap.

Teachers can choose specific case studies when teaching these standards, including Native focused ones. Some ways to include Native scientific knowledge into NGSS case studies are:

- Reading about local Native stewardship work.
- Connecting science concepts to traditional stories.
- Learning about how Native peoples practice sustainability
- Learning about the cultural importance of plants and animals.
- Learning about Native answers to current scientific problems

**California's Social Studies Framework** assigns specific history topics to each grade. Even so, teachers can include Native topics by:

- Making connections to sovereignty, settler and extractive colonialism, imperialism, genocide, resilience, and social justice.
- Including Native voices in lessons on Western Expansion, U.S. and CA history.
- Highlight solidarity between Native peoples and other Indigenous groups.

Teachers may feel overwhelmed, under informed and not sure where to begin improving their curricula.

Here are few Do's and Don'ts that can guide teachers:

**Do's**

- Research and connect with the Tribes in your local area.
- Reach out to education institutions like libraries, community colleges, and cultural centers for help and learning resources.
- Use sources that:
  - Center Native voices.
  - Present Native people in a way that is not only in the past tense.
- Connect with other teachers about their work around this issue and consider sharing work and asking for feedback.
- Integrate suggestions from our "Building Supportive Classrooms" tool.

**Don'ts**

- Assume that Native students and families are willing and able to fill in missing information for you.
- Assume a Tribal community will have the time to give you the materials you need. Instead, use a variety of knowledge sources and connect with other educators.
- Share songs, prayers, or ceremonial traditions with students without being given explicit approval to do so.



## Concluding Thoughts

As Native adults who were once Native students, we wish our teachers had understood our background a bit more. This school year, Native students across the state are learning about the first Thanksgiving, Columbus, the Trail of Tears, the California Missions, the Gold Rush, and Western Expansion. Their teachers may or may not realize they have Native students in their classes. Their teachers may or may not include actual Native voices into their lessons. But what is included can have real, lasting impacts on how Native and non-Native students understand the first peoples of this land we now share.

In this guide, we have detailed some of the major elements of Native identity, including government structures, assumptions, and stereotypes. We have provide alternative ways of thinking about challenges in the classroom, and advocate for a strengths-based approach to teaching, that supports open dialogue between educators and Tribal communities. Finally, we provide a wide range of concrete suggestions for improving your practice. Our goal is to enhance accessibility. Accessibility for non-Native educators so that they can understand their students better, accessibility for families trying to navigate a complex system, and accessibility for students who may or may not feel that school is a place for them.

We hope you will be able to apply what you learned in this guide to your work with students and their families. While the tools included in this guide are helpful for supporting Native students, many of them are just examples of good teaching. They can be applied in the classroom regardless of the demographics of the students you teach.

We at Redbud Resource Group hope that this guide moves us one step closer to seeing, loving, and supporting all of our students. It takes effort to learn about those who are not like us, and your decision to learn about Native peoples will make you and your teaching stronger.

Thank you.

Taylor Pennewell  
*Tyme Maidu Nation,  
Berry Creek Rancheria*

Madison Esposito  
*Tyme Maidu Nation,  
Berry Creek Rancheria*



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# Appendix

Educators do so much more than simply teach. We often find ourselves supporting entire families, not just students. In family-educator meetings, it is common to discover a family's need to be connected with services that can support their success.

For Native families, there are specific organizations that work solely on behalf of the Native community. Having an awareness of this general infrastructure may be helpful for educators working with Native families.

## The Structure of Help: Native Specific Programming

### ICWA – THE 1978 INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

The 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) created a set of policies for state agencies and court systems handling child custody matters involving Native youth.

Native students involved in the Child Welfare system are assigned an ICWA representative who advocates on their behalf. Ideally, these representatives use culturally responsive methods for supporting the child and their family.

While it is unlikely that an educator would be contacted by an ICWA worker, it is important to know that Tribal governments have their own separate rules and regulations in regard to child welfare services.

## Program Examples

There are many more Native support systems that exist, and most local communities have their own iterations of the systems described above. While some of your Native students and their families may receive support from these programs, some may not. The benefit of knowing these programs exist is that, should the need appear, you will be able to connect families to the support their need.

### IHS – INDIAN HEALTH SERVICES

Many communities have IHS clinics that serve Native families. Common services and programs include dental and medicine services, mental health services, cultural classes, community gatherings.

One benefit of IHS centers is that they may give Native people greater access to health care that considers specific cultural needs [48]. Some centers even provide support for children with special needs, support groups for parents, and may fund field trips and outings that help connect families to their cultures. While some Native families might go to IHS centers for their health care needs, others may not. Most IHS centers have a leadership team that connects with the Tribal leaders in the local area. This ensures that the care provided reflects the needs of the local community.

**BIE – BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION**

This bureau serves in many different capacities throughout Indian Country. The BIE provides support and resources to Tribally run schools and also directly runs some schools.

The BIE publishes regular reports on the needs and successes of Native students. Reports might include information related to matriculation, behavior, special education, and more. For teachers interested in issues around equity, reading this reports might prove helpful.

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**BIA – BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Established as the governing body for managing the lands designated for reservations. The BIA is now a central agency for distributing infrastructure resources across Indian Country. This includes funding for internet infrastructure, building roads and public transport, and managing natural disasters such as wildfires. In addition the BIA also offers social support services such as ICWA.

The BIA website also provides significant information about Indian Country. For teachers who wish to learn more about the topics included in this booklet, the BIA site could be a good place to start.

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**OPIH – OFFICE OF PUBLIC AND INDIAN HOUSING**

This office is a subsection of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Their focus is supporting Native communities through connecting program participants to affordable housing resources.

For each community, there is a local OPIH branch, or a housing authority similar to the OPIH for Native families to access.

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## Reflection Notes

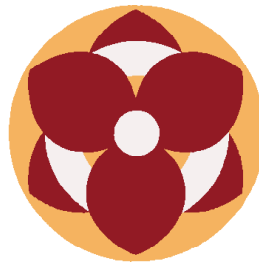
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**NeeSimPom**

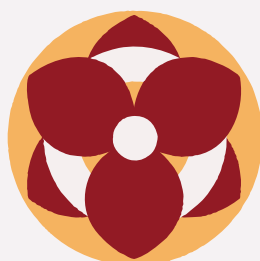
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