

Best Practices in Supporting American Indian and Alaska Native Students

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Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction.....	6
The State’s Shared Trust Responsibility to Native Education	6
Background and Relevant Research.....	7
Research-Informed Best Practices	12
Implementation Strategies.....	15
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	18
References.....	21

Executive Summary

Introduction

This white paper from the Oregon Department of Education's Office of Indian Education highlights the urgent need for equitable and supportive learning environments for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. Drawing on insights from the April 2025 presentation to the Quality Education Commission, it introduces a research-based framework emphasizing the following priorities:

1. Building Holistic Support Systems
2. Embracing Culturally Responsive Practices
3. Improving Native student Data Equity
4. Fostering Native Excellence
5. Promoting Tribal Languages

We call for a strategic, statewide implementation of best practices to ensure all AI/AN students receive a high-quality education that honors their heritage and meets their unique needs.

American Indian and Alaska Native+ (AI/AN+) students have diverse cultures, languages and communities that contribute to elements of resiliency and the cultural and individual assets they bring to their educational experiences. AI/AN+ students also face distinct challenges that influence both their academic experience, performance and overall wellbeing. They often face systemic barriers rooted in historical and cultural trauma and experience health disparities, lower academic achievement, resource scarcity, and heightened safety concerns within school environments. This paper examines the underlying factors contributing to these issues and considers how addressing them could lead to meaningful, long-term improvements for students, their communities and the state.

Root Causes

- **Historical and Cultural Trauma**
Centuries of systemic oppression—including forced assimilation, land dispossession, and boarding school policies—have inflicted intergenerational trauma on Native communities. These traumas directly impact social determinants of health (SDOH), which are tightly linked to academic outcomes.
- **Language Erasure**
Educational policies aimed at cultural eradication led to the suppression of Native languages. Despite these efforts, some languages persist, though exposure and the

opportunity to learn them need improvement. Language revitalization is urgently needed to preserve cultural identity and support educational engagement.

- **Biased Data Representation**

Native students are often misrepresented and/or undercounted in educational data due to flawed federal definitions and inadequate multiracial identification protocols. These data practices skew metrics like graduation rates and special education placement, leading to misinformed policy and resource allocation.

- **Lack of Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Representative Staff**

Curricula often exclude Native history and perspectives, contributing to student disengagement. Most AI/AN students rarely encounter Native educators or culturally relevant instruction, which exacerbates feelings of alienation and reduces academic motivation.

Impacts and Consequences

- **School Disengagement**

Mistrust in the education system—rooted in historical trauma and cultural mismatches—leads to early disconnection, often beginning around 3rd grade. This is a critical period for literacy development and a predictor of future academic success.

- **Disproportionate Achievement and Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)**

Native students face unique and adverse SDOH, including poverty, limited healthcare access, and environmental challenges. These conditions correlate with lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates, and disproportionate placement in special education.

- **Language Exposure Deficits**

Half of AI/AN students in the U.S. report no exposure to their heritage languages. Exposure is highest in Bureau of Indian Education schools and also correlates with the density of Native students in a school, suggesting that community context matters.

- **Data Bias and Resource Gaps**

Poor identification practices result in small sample sizes for research, underrepresentation in gifted programs, and overrepresentation in special education. These gaps hinder effective intervention and perpetuate disparities in discipline and achievement. Inaccurate and non-representative data reporting also impairs the fulfillment of treaty obligations, funding decisions, and instructional design. When students with diverse identities are excluded from AI/AN counts, it limits access to federal support and skews accountability metrics.

- **Toxic School Climates and Persistent Inequities**

Cultural insensitivity and biased historical narratives foster hostile environments. These climates reinforce trauma and alienation, perpetuating educational disparities.

- **Long-Term Social and Economic Impacts**

Educational disengagement translates into broader civic and economic disconnection. Native youth consistently show the highest rates of disconnection from school and work, with ripple effects on health, income, and intergenerational opportunity.

Despite these challenges and their impacts and consequences, numerous opportunities have emerged to improve outcomes for Oregon's AI/AN+ students that will also impact their communities. The holistic and integrated approaches described in this paper are rooted in not only research-supported best practices, but also via centering of culture, language, identity and sovereignty.

Key Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- **Cultivate Holistic Systems of Support:** Implementation of diverse and coordinated strategies that address the underlying systemic factors contributing to academic disparities is critical. The development and promotion of teaching practices reflective of Native cultures, languages, and perspectives, enhances student engagement and achievement. In conjunction, the investment in multi-tiered, research-informed initiatives culturally grounded support systems will improve outcomes for Native students. Doing this work is made more effective by shaping policies and practices that honor educational sovereignty and result from engagement in meaningful collaboration with tribal communities.
- **Center Culturally Responsive Approaches:** Investing in inclusive, culturally affirming practices and supporting educators who implement them boosts student engagement, belonging, and academic success. These approaches are especially impactful for Native students when promoting mental health and well-being through frameworks tailored to their needs.
- **Address Inequity in Native Student Data:** Efforts to improve data justice should focus on correcting misidentification and undercounting of Native youth and recognizing their unique political status and rights. Key actions include ensuring accurate identification of Native students, tackling disparities in special education classification, increasing Native representation in Talented and Gifted (TAG) programs and understanding the causes of and reducing disciplinary inequities.
- **Pursue Native Excellence:** Academic achievement is vital for self-determination and tribal sovereignty. Education empowers Native youth to lead in governance, law, healthcare, and other critical fields and enhances their civic engagement. Strategies include the promotion of culturally responsive literacy strategies, the expansion of

access to career-focused learning and technical education, and the emphasis of high school as a cornerstone for post-secondary success.

- **Champion Tribal Languages:** Tribal languages are central to cultural identity and resilience. Supporting language revitalization in schools strengthens student well-being and honors Native heritage. This work includes the implementation of tribal language programs, support of tribal language educators and the support of Native multilingual language learners and their districts.

Introduction

Utilizing resources from the Oregon Department of Education’s Office of Indian Education—including insights from their [April 2025 presentation to the Quality Education Commission](#)—this white paper outlines the urgent need to create equitable and supportive learning environments for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. It introduces a framework grounded in research-based best practices aimed at enhancing educational outcomes for AI/AN learners. Emphasizing educational equity, recognizing the lasting effects of Indian Removal, Relocation, and the American Indian Boarding School Policy on Native communities, the framework outlines five key goals to support AI/AN students:

- Cultivating Holistic Systems of Support
- Centering Culturally Responsive Approaches
- Addressing inequities in Native student data
- Pursuing Native excellence, and
- Promoting tribal languages

These integrated goals contribute to a cohesive and comprehensive approach to supporting AI/AN students. This paper extends beyond existing state efforts including current findings and programs by advocating for the comprehensive and strategic implementation of best practices to ensure that all **AI/AN students have access to a high-quality education.**

The State’s Shared Trust Responsibility to Native Education

Noted by the Supreme Court in the *United States v. Mitchell*, 1983, the United States has a unique federal trust responsibility stemming from the treaties signed between sovereign tribes and the U.S Government in the 1800s. The provisions outlined in these treaties by the government that promised tribes access to education largely in exchange for land and rights; however, although Indian Nations knew they would receive the benefits of Western education and teachers to teach their children about non-Native ways, they were not aware that “the new ways would replace, or try to replace, native values or knowledge systems” (Harjo, 2014, p. 4).

Today, the responsibility for Native education in the United States and in Oregon is now shared between three sovereign government systems—tribal, federal, and state. As such, Native education is known as a tri-lateral responsibility (Reinhardt & Maday, 2005). As representatives of state governments, it is critical to understand the unique political class to which Native students belong because of the federal trust responsibility to Indian children.

Background and Relevant Research

This report employs terminology to describe Native students first introduced for ODE use in the Review of Key Indicators for American Indian/Alaska Natives in Oregon from [2020](#) (Oregon Department of Education AI/AN Review of Key Indicators, 2020) and refined in the Review of Key indicators published in [2025](#) (Oregon Department of Education: AI/AN Review of Key Indicators, 2025). The objective of this revised terminology is to better represent Oregon’s Native students and acknowledge their diverse identities. However, even within these attempts to use more expansive and representative terminology, we acknowledge that the impacts of settler colonialism, removal, relocation, reservations, termination and restoration remain. When discussing state and federal data, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) primarily uses **AI/AN+** as the most inclusive term, encompassing students with tribal affiliation or descent from a Federally Recognized Native American Tribe or Alaska Native Corporation (AI/AN), as well as multiracial and/or Hispanic Native students. The more limited AI/AN designation is reserved for students whose sole selected race/ethnicity is American Indian/Alaska Native and is in alignment with the Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Standard. The term “Native” is used through this report to discuss AI/AN communities and individuals in general and follows the example set in the [Indigenous Students Count Landscape Analysis](#) (American Institutes for Research, 2023) of using a broad term for communities in a consistent manner and the precedent set in the [2025-2030 American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success Plan](#).

AI/AN+ students experience unique circumstances that impact their academic success (Oregon Department of Education: AI/AN Review of Key Indicators, 2025) and more importantly, their wellbeing. At a national level, AI/AN students experience a wide range of educational environments, with diverse school types and resources (Rampey B. F., 2021). Educationally, they also face numerous challenges, such as low academic achievement rates, high rates of bullying and fear of harm at school (National Indian Education Association, 2025). AI/AN+ students also bring substantial assets to their educational endeavors rooted in their diverse cultures, languages and heritage. Their unique experiences not only bring resiliency and contribute to the unique perspectives of each Native community but also result in a different approach to learning. Although Native communities are not a monolith, Native students often bring a distinctive set of values, lenses and processes to learning and the encouragement and facilitation of their participation in school diversifies and enhance learning environments for all students (Pewewardy, 2002). This paper delves into the root causes of these impacts and explores the potential long-term consequences of addressing these causes and impacts on students and the broader community.

Student and Educator Demographics

According to the National Congress of American Indians (2020), roughly 90% of Native students now attend public schools under state jurisdiction. The remainder (about 8%) attend federally funded Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, private schools, or other educational institutions (National Congress of American Indians, 2020).

In the 2023-24 School year Oregon had 547,424 students enrolled of which 1.2% identified as AI/AN and 7.5% were AI/AN+. Moreover, the number of AI/AN+ students enrolled since the 2019-20 school year has declined over the last five years (Oregon Department of Education: AI/AN Review of Key Indicators, 2025).

For the 2024-25 School year, the new [Tribal Affiliation Code](#) was implemented and included in Secure Student Identifier (SSID) collections. Preliminary data from databases using this code as of the writing of this report indicate that 7,770 students self-disclosed as tribally affiliated to 278 federally recognized tribes. For this same period, 5,902 students were supported by the [Title VI Indian Education Formula Grants](#) under 28 approved programs.

When examining educator demographics for the 2023-24 school year, Oregon had 89,249 educators (a designation inclusive of teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, support staff, counselors, specialist and clinical staff), and 0.82% identified as AI/AN and 3.47% identified as AI/AN+. Within this broader educator designation the breakdown of AI/AN and AI/AN+ educators (respectively) was as follows: Teachers (0.56% and 2.49%), Administrators (0.53% and 2.72%), Paraprofessionals (0.96% and 4.85%), School support staff, counselors, specialists and medical and clinical staff (0.97% and 3.68%) (Oregon Department of Education: AI/AN Review of Key Indicators, 2025). For the 2023-24 school year, Oregon had one school counselor for every 326 students (ODE staff Position and Fall Enrollment, whereas the recommended ratio is 1:250 (American School Counselor Association).

Root Causes

Historical and Cultural Trauma:

Native communities have experienced an array of historical and cultural trauma resulting in cross-generational harm (Brave Heart, 2003) (Subica, 2022). This harm manifests in impacts to social determinants of health which are closely tied to academic outcomes (Allison-Burbank, 2016).

Language erasure:

Historical educational practices that included forced removal and assimilation, kidnapping of children and placing them in boarding schools, and forced removal from their lands were

explicitly designed to eradicate native languages and cultures (Rappeport, Decoteau, & Conn, 2022). Reviews of Native student experiences in learning their heritage languages have shown limited and falling levels of exposure and learning (McCarty T. L., State of the Field, 2011). Yet, in the face of widespread efforts to erase native languages over centuries, some persist, and preservation and revitalization is critically needed (Rappeport, Decoteau, & Conn, 2022).

Biased Representation in Data:

Biased representation of Native students in data (American Institutes for Research, 2023), curricula and school culture (Oregon Department of Education AI/AN SSP 2025-2030, 2025) are critical contributors to educational inequities rooted more in structural differences in access, opportunity and cultural relevance than ability.

Lack of Culturally Representative Curricula and Practices:

The lack of a culturally responsive and representative curriculum has been repeatedly postulated as a source of disengagement for students and a contributor to reduced attendance and increased dropout rates inhibiting students' achievement (Leong, 2024) (Martinez, 2014). Moreover, the majority of AI/AN students have disparate levels of exposure to representative AI/AN faculty and staff at their schools and the disparity continues with regard to the incorporation of AI/AN culture or history into instruction (Rampey, Faircloth, Whorton, & Deaton, National Indian Education Study 2019 (NCES 2021-018), 2021).

Impacts

School Disengagement:

Ranging from disease introduction, genocidal policies, cultural erasure and the forced removal of children to American Indian boarding schools, these events have had lasting impacts on individuals and communities and have been detrimental to relationships between students and families with the education system (Allison-Burbank, 2016) (Evans-Campbell, 2008). A lack of representative teachers or teachers with culturally relevant knowledge and understanding contributes to students' feelings of lack of care by their teachers (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). Moreover, mismatches between cultures such as poor educator representation and a lack of understanding of Native cultural practices and norms are considered contributors to ongoing academic achievement disparities (Burack et al., 2014; Fryberg et al., 2018). Disconnection begins early (at around 3-4th grade) and aligns with the timing of early literacy (3rd grade) as an indicator of high school graduation (Nelson-Barber & Boxerman, 2023).

Social Determinants of Health and Disproportionate Achievement:

Best Practices in Supporting American Indian and Alaska Native Students

Defined as the conditions, social, economic and environmental that impact a diverse array of health, and quality of life outcomes, the social determinants of health (SDOH) for American Indian/Alaska Native people differ greatly from those of other major racial / ethnic groups in the U.S. (Singh, Lee, Kim, & Williams, 2024). These highly impacted SDOH are also associated with negative impacts on educational outcomes such as graduation rates, rates of suspension and expulsion and dropout rates along with disproportionate representation in special education for AI/AN students (Guiberson & Vining, 2023).

Language Exposure and Learning:

A 2015 study of 4th and 8th graders showed that approximately half of AI/AN students reported never being exposed to their native languages and exposure was associated with relative density of AI/AN students at school and was highest at Bureau of Indian Education schools (Rampey, Faircloth, Whorton, & Deaton, National Indian Education Study 2015: A Closer Look, 2019).

Limited and/or biased data representation leads to reduced resources:

The inconsistent and unique identification of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) individuals has led to major challenges in accurately representing them in student data. Federal definitions and data collection methods, especially those that don't allow for multiracial identification, often result in undercounting, particularly for students with diverse heritage. Incomplete AI/AN student identification data then skews important educational metrics like graduation rates and academic performance, making it difficult to assess progress or allocate resources effectively. In Oregon, it is estimated that 77-85% of AI/AN students were undercounted in the period from 2017-2021 (American Institutes for Research, 2023). Moreover, AI/AN students are overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in Talented and Gifted Programs (TAG). Current research suggests that bias plays a role in the identification process for such programs and it has complex interactions with access to resources that impact measures of school readiness as well as factors known to increase the risk for disability identification (Hibel & Faircloth, 2008) (Morgan, et al., 2018) and suggest that identification processes should use culturally and language responsive disability screening and evaluation (Morgan, et al., 2018). However, research into understanding these phenomena may be hampered by the way AI/AN students are identified in the first place and thus generate small sample sizes used in research studies (Wold, Neville, & Monaghan-Geernaert, 2023).

Small sample sizes and poor identification also contribute to an incomplete understanding of the factors and solutions to disproportionately high Native student discipline (Brown, 2014). Culturally relevant approaches and interventions will be critical to addressing this phenomenon

not just regarding prevention and intervention, but also regarding adequate data to understand it (Rolnick, 2024).

Potential Consequences

Perpetuation of toxic climates and inequities:

The perpetuation of trauma via elements of school culture continues disparities for Native students. Cultural insensitivity, bias in historical narratives that focus on victimhood rather than historical and contemporary achievements, persistence and resilience as well as actively hostile school environments contribute to an unwelcoming school climate (Martinez, 2014).

Social and Economic Consequences:

Disengagement from the school environment by students and families is also translated into other aspects of civic life and has long term health and financial impacts, not just for individuals but also for their children. In 2022, when broken down by race and ethnicity across six major groups, Native American youth consistently had the highest disconnection rates in the country and these were consistently higher than those of other groups across the years measured (Lewis, Powers, Cara, & Harvey, 2024).

Reliable data are essential to uphold treaty responsibilities, fund targeted programs, and monitor AI/AN student outcomes (Ault & John, 2017). Current reporting guidelines for race/ethnicity to the U.S. department of Education essentially disallow students with diverse identities to count towards the American Indian / Alaska Native designation in reporting. This practice has resulted in a significant undercount of students who have American Indian / Alaska Native as well as other ethnic and racial identities because they are by default placed in other categories. Moreover, differential eligibility criteria for federal programs that support students create additional barriers to access and support. Beyond access to resources, the lack of accurate representation in data also hampers research endeavors, accountability reporting (due to required suppression) and instructional design and strategy (American Institutes for Research, 2023).

Data and Opportunities

Language Diversity:

Since time immemorial, American Indian tribal languages have been spoken in Oregon and are still spoken today. In the 2023-24 School year Oregon students reported speaking more than 360 languages in total, including 11 which were American Indian (Oregon Department of Education, Statewide Reportcard, 2024). Currently, various Oregon tribes have active language revitalization programs and are doing so in collaboration with the [Northwest Indigenous Language Institute](#) (NILI) at the University of Oregon. NILI consults and collaborates with

communities on projects that support the unique needs of each language community such as teacher training, curriculum development, language documentation and uses in technology. The ODE supports language revitalization by supporting the integration of tribal languages into literacy instruction via the Tribal Early Literacy Grants established under [House Bill 3198](#).

Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness:

A review of the available research shows that the inclusion of culturally aligned practices and curricula benefit native students in diverse ways, including but not limited to academic performance (Porterfield, 2023). Additionally, analyses of the results from the National Indian Education Study (NIES) conducted in 2015 on fourth and eighth graders showed that Native students performed better when their school gave them access to materials about Native people, and that 25-30% of Native students have a strong interest in reading about Native cultures. Further, exposure to native languages increased the likelihood of interest in reading about Native culture and a higher sense of cultural knowledge (Rampey, Faircloth, Whorton, & Deaton, National Indian Education Study 2015: A Closer Look, 2019).

Oregon's Commitment to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN+) Students

Oregon has a commitment to fostering strong relationships with its Nine Federally Recognized Tribes. Executive Order No. 96-30 acknowledges the tribes' pre-U.S. existence and their unique legal status, emphasizing the importance of respectful government-to-government relations. This commitment is reinforced by state law (ORS 182.162–182.168), mandating tribal consultation and requiring a targeted curriculum and a holistic student success plan (ORS 329.843 and 329.493). Additionally, the American Indian and Alaska Native State Advisory Committee plays a key role in shaping Indian Education policy by offering guidance, advocacy, and recommendations, including measurable goals for the Oregon Department of Education's AI/ANSSP program.

Research-Informed Best Practices

Drawn from ODE's 2025-2030 [American Indian/ Alaska Native Student Success Plan](#), this section delves into the research-informed best practices that imbue the five goals described in the Success Plan and aim to both support student success and promote the history, culture and language of AI/AN+ students.

Cultivate Holistic Systems of Support

- Native youth in Oregon’s K-12 system face distinct challenges, including historical trauma, curriculum gaps, and unequal resources that demand a holistic and integrated approach to address.
- Incorporation of diverse and coordinated strategies to address the systemic factors contributing to disparate academic achievement (Leong, 2024) (Nelson-Barber & Boxerman, 2023).
- Develop culturally responsive pedagogies to support AI/AN+ educational outcomes (McCarty T. L., 2021)
- Honor educational sovereignty through tribal consultation (Oregon Department of Education, Toolkit for Tribal Consultation version 2.1., 2024)
- Invest in targeted programs improves outcomes for Native students that draw on research-backed practices that are multi-tiered and holistic in nature (Leong, 2024) (McCarty T. L., 2021).

Center Culturally Responsive Approaches

Investment in culturally affirming and inclusive practices and in the educators responsible for delivering them, enhances student engagement, fosters a stronger sense of belonging, and builds school communities rooted in mutual respect and equity and helps improve student academic outcomes (Chambers Cantrell, Sampson, Kristen, & Rebershaw, 2022). These impacts are documented in a broad sense and for Indigenous students specifically (Tortola, 2024). Moreover, the use of culturally appropriate frameworks, tools, and practices responsive to their specific needs support Native youth mental health and well-being (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2025).

Address Inequity in Native Student Data

Data Justice efforts at ODE encompass shifts in data collection practices and make inroads towards addressing historic and contemporary injustices and harms perpetuated through the continued misidentification and undercounting of Native youth that fails to consider the unique political designation and subsequent rights and responsibilities afforded to AI/AN individuals through federal trust and treaty responsibilities (American Insititutes for Research, 2023).

- Advance equitable identification of AI/AN Students (American Insititutes for Research, 2023) (Ault & John, 2017)
- Address the complex factors leading to disparate identification of Native students in Special Education (Hibel & Faircloth, 2008) (Morgan, et al., 2018) (Wold, Neville, & Monaghan-Geernaert, 2023).

- Increase representation in TAG programs by using inclusive and culturally responsive processes for identification (Gentry, 2021).
- Address disparities in discipline, suspensions, expulsions, and pushouts (Rolnick, 2024).

Pursue Native Excellence

The academic success of Native youth—from early literacy in elementary school to higher education—is essential for preserving tribal sovereignty, culture, and self-determination. Education equips Indigenous students with the tools to engage with and shape the political, legal, and economic systems that affect their communities. By earning degrees and professional credentials, they can take on leadership roles in vital areas like governance, law, healthcare, education, and environmental protection—fields that safeguard treaty rights and cultural heritage. Moreover, their achievements in postsecondary education contribute to the economic resilience of tribal communities, ensuring future generations have access to resources and representation. Supporting Native students' educational journeys is a powerful investment in their tribes' future, preparing them to lead, advocate, and inspire lasting change.

The following strategies connect participation in school with success in higher education and career paths (Nelson-Barber & Boxerman, 2023).

- Expand culturally responsive literacy practices that help engage and motivate students (Gillispie, 2021)
- Increase enrollment in [Career Connected Learning](#) (CCL) and [Career and Technical Education](#) (CTE) and heighten urgency of High School as foundational for success in post-secondary education

Champion Tribal Languages

Tribal languages are essential to the cultural identity and sovereignty of Native communities. Revitalization efforts not only aim to preserve these languages for future generations but prioritizing their integration into schools also honors and celebrates Native culture. When students learn their heritage languages, it supports their academic success and the overall well-being of Native youth by fostering belonging and resilience (McCarty T. L., 2021). Language revitalization is supported in various ways. These include the uplifting and amplification of tribal language revitalization efforts, support for the implementation and tribal language programs and strengthening and providing holistic support for licensed tribal language teachers and school district tribal language programs (White House Council on Native American Affairs, 2024). Additionally, supporting AI/AN+ multilingual learners (MLLs) by broadening identification efforts that are inclusive and hold fidelity to their unique experiences as well as supporting school districts with AI/AN+ MLLs by recognizing fluency in students' tribal languages, providing

professional development to educators and supporting the development of culturally responsive and relevant curricula are some other key strategies (Caruzaa, 2016).

Implementation Strategies

This section outlines the implementation of the research-informed best practices identified above, organized around the five priorities outlined in the AI/AN SSP: Cultivating Holistic Systems of Support, Centering Culturally Responsive Approaches, Addressing Inequity in Student Data, Pursuing Native Excellence and Championing Tribal Languages. Each area will include practical examples, potential barriers, and mitigation strategies.

Cultivate Holistic Systems of Support

Leverage key legislation.

- [ORS 329.843](#) is the Oregon Revised Statute requiring the development and implementation of a statewide education plan for students who are American Indian or Alaska Native. This plan is intended to be aligned with other statewide education plans for specific student groups and is part of the broader legal framework for education in Oregon. The 2025-2030 the [American Indian/ Alaska Native Student Success Plan](#) (AI/AN SSP) is the most recent iteration has resulted in two iterations of the [American Indian/ Alaska Native Student Success Plan](#) (AI/AN SSP). The plan includes goals and an overview, objectives as a roadmap, evidence of Restoration, Reclamation, and Revitalization, throughlines for ensuring success, and key partnerships and collaborations.
- [ORS 329.493](#) is the Oregon State Revised Statute referred to as Tribal History Shared History (THSH) and ensures Native representation in curricula, a significant step toward integrating the histories, cultures, and contributions of the nine federally recognized Tribes of Oregon into the public-school curriculum. This legislation requires the Oregon Department of Education to develop and provide a K–12 curriculum on the Native American experience in Oregon. School districts must then implement this curriculum.

Support THSH and curriculum expansion.

- For the 27-29 [Integrated Guidance](#) application or consolidated application, require districts to submit their Tribal History, Shared History implementation plan.
- Provide resources directly to schools to support the implementation of THSH.
- Continue investments in the development of new THSH lesson plans and the updating of existing lesson plans.

Best Practices in Supporting American Indian and Alaska Native Students

Use [the Tribal Consultation Toolkit](#) to enact process and strategies but also provides comprehensive resources supporting the impacts of effective consultation.

- Provide support to affected Districts and ESDs and the Nine Federally Recognized Tribes to enter into data sharing agreements to support authentic consultation efforts.
- Provide funding to school districts to support Tribal Consultation efforts (bolster student information systems and the use of data suites).

Invest in targeted programs designed to increase outcomes for Native students

- Expand the [Tribal Attendance Promising Practices](#) (TAPP) programs
- Develop a manual and cultivate a Title VI Indian Education Community of practice, including bringing training opportunities to grantees throughout Oregon.

Center Culturally Responsive Approaches

Support educators in the successful implementation of THSH curriculum

- Ensure equitable access to professional development and instructional coaching for educators by elevating district voices for what they need to support and develop their educators.
- Provide continued investment in professional development for district implementation of THSH
- Promote the implementation of the place-based curriculum of the nine federally recognized tribes, to *further supplement* THSH lesson plans
- Provide additional resources directly to districts in implementing Tribal curriculum

Investment in partnerships between Indian-based organizations and districts

Support the use of culturally appropriate frameworks, tools and practices that support Native youth mental health and well-being

- Leverage Oregon's Transformative Social Emotional Learning Framework (TSEL) ([ORS 329.045](#)).
- Maintain a resource of community based and Indian-based organizations who can provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 support to students to support districts in bringing healing informed and suicide prevention practices to their areas
- Provide resources and funding directly to districts to implement Oregon's TSEL

Address Inequity in Native Student Data

Advance Equitable Identification of Native Students

- Continued collection of tribal affiliation data from families.
- Require AI/AN+ and tribal affiliation data to be published in local data publications, as with other student groups impacted by flawed federal definitions (e.g. Black and African American +, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander +, etc.).
- Ensure equity in access to accurate and actionable student data, including visual representations of data.

Best Practices in Supporting American Indian and Alaska Native Students

- De-silo critical data analysis work Agency-wide to ensure the provision of common - yet still context specific - definitions, support, and tools to disaggregate data across an ecosystem of a district and its schools in order to act on it.
- Creation of internal data suite to increase interdepartmental access to data needed for program enhancement and design.
- Provide additional supports to ESDs and Districts on the Tribal Affiliation data collection and MOUs to share data with tribes.

Address disparate identification of AI/AN students in Special Education, disparate rates of AI/AN students graduating with a Modified Diploma and increase their representation in Talented and Gifted Programs (TAG)

- Provide critical investments into understanding why gaps persist in these key areas despite guidance to address or eliminate disparities

Address Disparities in Discipline, Suspensions, Expulsions, and Pushouts

- Invest in changes to Oregon school discipline law to ensure it is aligned to other frameworks provided to districts (i.e. Oregon TSEL).
- Provide funds to districts to staff additional FTE to ensure Oregon's TSEL framework is implemented.

Pursue Native Excellence

Expand Culturally Responsive Early Literacy Practices

- Increase recruitment and retention of AIAN teachers and educators in elementary positions to support Tribal Early Literacy efforts.
- Sustained investment in supporting Early Literacy at the district level.

Increase Enrollment in Career Connected Learning (CCL) and Career and Technical education (CTE)

- Funding for districts to maintain CTE/CCL programs
- Increase CTE and CCL availability and options in schools serving large AI/AN student population

Heighten Urgency that High School is the Foundation for Success in Post-Secondary Education

- ODE should address competing, conflicting, or duplicative college and career planning to ensure supports and resources are aligned.
- Hire qualified school counselors (to improve current counselor to student ratios), psychologists and social workers; addressing the gap between the need for these positions and the number of candidates in programs across the state.

Champion Tribal Languages

Implement Tribal Language Programs

- Continued funding to tribes to support the revitalization of their languages and to increase language teachers.

Support AI/AN+ Multilingual Learners (MLLs)

- ODE to create guidance for districts to support AI/AN+ students who are also MLLs.

- ODE needs to bolster Seal of Biliteracy efforts to ensure districts are supported in awarding the Seal of Biliteracy equitably to students who have demonstrated proficiency* in a tribal language (*as determined by the tribe).
- Make funds available for Districts to create sustainable American Indian language programs, including high school programs, to support AI/AN students' attainment of the Seal of Biliteracy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This white paper has examined the critical need for equitable and supportive educational environments for American Indian and Alaska Native students in Oregon, drawing upon the [2025-2030 AI/AN Student Success Plan](#). Key findings highlight the significant number of MLs in Oregon, their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and the persistent challenges they face, including academic achievement gaps, social-emotional well-being concerns, and limited access to opportunities. These challenges stem from root causes such as systemic inequities, lack of awareness among educators, language barriers with families, limited access to early childhood education, and broader societal factors (also see [2023-24 American Indian/Alaska Native Students in Oregon: A Review of Key Indicators report](#)).

Key Findings

- AI/AN+ students represent an expanded portion (7.5%%) of Oregon's student population when considering a more expansive classification of AI/AN students (versus only 1.2% when only considering AI/AN students), with 278 unique tribal affiliations and speaking at 11 American Indian languages
- These students carry the long-term effects of historical and cultural trauma and experience academic achievement gaps and limited access to rigorous coursework and enrichment.
- Challenges are rooted in systemic issues, including a history of Native language erasure, disparities in representation in data, reduced access to resources underfunding, lack of cultural representation and relevant instruction, needs in educator training, and reduced trust by communities and families.

Most Critical Solutions

ODE's AI/AN SSP identifies five priority areas with corresponding best practices that offer the most promising solutions:

- Cultivate Holistic Systems of Support: Prioritizing and facilitating the use of integrated and holistic approaches that preserve, and honor cultural heritage and unique gifts

allows the Native youth to succeed academically and results in the strengthening of Native communities for future generations.

- Center Culturally Responsive Approaches:
- Address Inequity in Native Student Data: Disparities in data representation contribute to inadequate access to resources, barriers to educational success and gaps in services. Addressing misidentification and undercounting creates a foundation for the implementation of other solutions.
- Pursue Native Excellence: Culturally relevant approaches that support strong foundations in early literacy and the facilitation, support and encouragement of students pursuing their education are vital to sovereignty, cultural preservation, tribal self-determination and future economic success.
- Champion Tribal Languages: the strengthening of Tribal languages honors and celebrates students' culture, contributes to holistic well-being and supports academic achievement.

Actionable Recommendations

To effectively implement the above solutions the following actionable recommendations are provided for various stakeholders:

Polymakers:

- Increase and sustain funding: Allocate adequate and sustained funding for programs and services that support AI/AN+ students and their communities. This includes funding for curricula, educator professional development and hires, tribal consultation and partnerships.
- Promote data justice: Create the necessary infrastructure and support to facilitate representative AI/AN+ student data collection, analysis and data access. Provide critical investments to support research into disparities and inequities.
- Develop expectations for support of AI/AN+ students: Via guidance, policy creation and alignment as well as reporting requirements.

Educators:

- Implement research-based instructional practices: Strategies such as culturally responsive teaching and the incorporation of THSH and tribal curricula.
- Utilize accurate and varied assessments: Employ assessments that measure both linguistic and content progress and recognize students' diverse strengths.
- Seek out diverse professional development opportunities: Engage in ongoing learning to enhance their skills in supporting AI/AN+ students.

For Other Stakeholders (Families, Community Organizations, etc.):

- Advocate for policies that support AI/AN: Engage with policymakers to advocate for increased funding, equitable policies, and access to high-quality programs.
- Share cultural knowledge and experiences: Contribute to creating culturally responsive learning environments by sharing their unique perspectives and knowledge.

This white paper explored the historical factors and current conditions impacting AI/AN+ students in Oregon. By examining the root causes of existing inequities and disparities, including historical and cultural trauma, systemic issues, data challenges and access to resources, we have highlighted the significant impact these factors have on students' academic achievement, social-emotional well-being, and future opportunities. Oregon's existing commitments to AI/AN+ students, via legislation, targeted programs and a comprehensive tribal consultation policy are foundational to continued development and improvement. This white paper emphasizes the importance of implementing research-informed best practices across five key goals. The practices we present, when implemented in an integrated and coordinated manner, and supported by adequate resources and policies, can begin to address the root causes of inequity, leverage the strengths of Native students and communities, and create learning environments where respect, empowerment and belonging are prioritized. The collaborative prioritization of these key goals by policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders will facilitate more equitable data gathering, improved resource allocation and student outcomes and build relationships with Native communities. This collaborative and holistic approach will not only maximize the impact of investments but also build public trust and ultimately contribute to a more just and equitable educational system for all of Oregon's students.

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