Tabletop Session Summary

July 8, 2021

Culturally Responsive Considerations for Summer Programs Targeted to Native Students

Presenters: Bernadette Anderson, National Comprehensive Center; Adrianne Elliott, National Indian Education Association; Joyce E. McFarland, Nez Perce Tribe (ID)

This tabletop discussion offered concrete and actionable culturally responsive practices that summer programs can implement to ensure that Native students and their families feel welcome and supported.

Session Highlights

» There are 644,000 Native students nationwide, 93 percent of whom attend public schools. The remaining students attend tribal and federally operated schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education.

» As the pandemic swept the nation, Native communities were hit hard. Existing challenges in education were laid bare. With evidence that out-of-school time programs can improve academic performance and social skills, these programs became an area of focus in terms of providing additional supports for students.

» A survey of Native parents revealed that while more than 80 percent of families would enroll their children in an afterschool program, program availability and accessibility are limited.

» There are several practical considerations for program planning for Native students. To begin, it’s important to identify successful local programs and promising practices that benefit Native students and engage Native communities in program design and adoption. It is vital that programs are responsive to the linguistic, cultural, and social characteristics of Native students. Providing training to staff on Native history, culture, customs, and values can be effective, as well as pairing staff with tribal mentors. Engaging tribal elders and leaders as volunteers can also be impactful. Once, adopted, the programs should be evaluated for effectiveness.

» Summer is also a unique time to prepare teachers to engage more effectively with Native students. The Nez Perce Tribe holds a Native Education Research Summit for teachers during the summer. A core value of their work is that education is about healing our relationship with the land, and so some of the summit activities have included visiting significant sites on the lands of the Nez Perce Tribe. This experience allows teachers to have a better understanding of how their students are connected to the land, and teachers also can reference those locations as they teach.

Shared Resources

» American Indian Science and Engineering Society

» American Indigenous Business Leaders
Questions and Answers on Culturally Responsive Considerations for Summer Programs Targeted to Native Students

Are there successful mentoring models for educators serving Native students throughout the summer, afterschool, or during the traditional school year?

The Nez Perce Tribe State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) has been successful with mentoring models. The mentors, known as the family engagement specialists and technical assistance coaches, are available to new staff. New hires are encouraged to go to the aforementioned summer summit to learn about the community and culture. In addition, the Lapwai Superintendent and principals attend the Nez Perce Circle of Elders meeting once a month to share information and receive input from the elders of the tribe.

Another example comes from the Muscogee Creek Nation. Elders from the tribe met for 6-9 months to work through the indicators of effectiveness around culture and language. They then created an educational “trunk” that includes activities, explanations, and other items that will help teachers to know more about their way of living. This resource can be used by teachers who may be uncomfortable asking for a mentor. It gives them an opportunity to explore on their own.

Can you share more about STEP and what it looks like today?

STEP emphasizes academic achievement, self-identity, social and emotional learning, and cognitive development. The family engagement specialist works with teams comprised of 50 percent parents and 50 percent staff. These teams come up with action plans to improve family engagement. Another area of work is with culturally responsive instruction. STEP has worked with the community to identify nine principles for passing on knowledge in a cultural context. They work with Mathematize to apply these cultural principles in classroom instruction. STEP also works with superintendents and principals to build their capacity to lead because their support is vital to keeping important initiatives in place.

What data should be collected to help meet the needs of students returning to school in the fall?

Many issues and needs are not new, but the pandemic has given programs the opportunity to elevate those needs/issues. The National Indian Education Association will publish their survey goals by August 2021. Their program team is working to build programs and partner with other organizations to expand programming.

Are there any examples of programs to help non-Native students expand their knowledge of Native culture?

The Nez Perce School District has a school that is majority non-Native, and it has Native programs available for everyone to join. The Boys and Girls Club, Culture Camp and other programs on the
reservation are examples of programs open to all students. In the past, non-Native children living just outside of the Cherokee tribal land have been able to participate in Native programming.