

The Indigenous Perspective on Disability and Special Education in Public Schools:  
A Professional Development for School Staff Supporting Students in Special Education

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Culturally Responsive Schooling with/in Indigenous Communities Professional Development  
Program

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Author Note:

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## Context & Rationale

I am a special education teacher specialized in Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Currently, I work with students across the Tempe Elementary School District with my caseload ranging from preschool through eighth grade for any given school year. The students I work with have varying degrees of hearing loss ranging from unilateral (one-sided) to hard of hearing to completely deaf with an American Sign Language Interpreter in class to visually access auditory information. I may support students minimally through a 504 Plan and my highest need students will be seen 3-4 days per week. In providing these supports, I will travel to multiple buildings in our district throughout the week. Each school year, my caseload will fluctuate and the students are from all different ethnic backgrounds. Currently, Tempe Elementary School District serves just over 11,000 students (as of May 2021) with 6.8% of our student population being Native American Americans with my specific caseload fluctuating from 10-15% Native American students any given school year.

I became a teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing in 2011 and relocated to Phoenix from Chicago in the winter of 2012 for a mid-year teaching position. Coming from the Midwest, I did not have the same educational experience or exposure to Native American culture as students in Arizona do. In the Chicago suburban public school system, I experienced an education where Native Americans were not portrayed as having active, thriving tribal communities. Instead, Native American tribes were portrayed in our textbooks and lessons as being largely active only during colonial times and then dramatically dwindling to a handful of very large tribes today. We learned that the remaining tribes have specific lands and that was it. There was no expansion to explain what the cultures are like and how many active tribes are still in existence.

Moving to Arizona I experienced a slight sense of “culture shock” when I began exploring my new home state. Unfortunately, my first teaching position did nothing to equip me for working with Native American students or their families or even understanding their culture. I had worked for a state agency at the time and was contracted out to multiple public school districts as well as charter school programs. At that time, I worked with preschool through high school grade levels. My only exposure and learning of Native American cultures were through the people I worked with out in the schools, not from my own agency. To be frank, as a brand new teacher I did not even realize at the time that I needed support in understanding Native American cultures and information about the tribes our agency supported through the districts and charters we served.

Fast forward five years later when I became employed with the Tempe Elementary School District, I realized my need for more Native American cultural training and support as a teacher that did not grow up in Arizona. I noticed I would receive emails that were sent out to the whole district about Native American holidays or rituals that may impact student attendance. I would always think, “That’s interesting,” but didn’t know what else to do with that information aside from just being aware of those situations. My second year in the district, I was fortunate enough to run into a woman who worked in our district’s Native American Program as a Native American Student Achievement (NASA) teacher. We began chatting about our positions and became quick friends, with both of us finding the other's position interesting. I openly shared with her my educational experience coming from Illinois, or rather lack thereof, relating to

Native American histories, culture, and tribal functions in the present day. She was intrigued by my experience but admitted that it was not surprising. Through our discussions we found ourselves contemplating how my experience was not an anomaly, that many Arizona teachers are “transplants” from other states just like I am, and how the lack of awareness of Native American culture is a serious disservice to our students, their families, and ultimately our community as a whole.

When the opportunity arose to participate in the Culturally Responsive Schooling in Indigenous Communities I was naturally drawn to applying. Upon enrolling in the seminar, I had to think about how to take what I would be learning and to make a strong impact within my district. Given my role as a teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing, I have a varying caseload from year to year and while I could obviously create lessons for students, I would only be able to share that lesson with a handful of students each year. After my enlightened discussion with one of the district’s NASA teachers, I knew I wanted to focus my project on creating a professional development for other educators and therapists like myself who specifically support students being evaluated for or are already in special education. The goal is to help these professionals understand the cultural differences of Native American students, tribal views on disabilities, and family perspectives on special education services through the public school system.

## **Topic Summary**

As this guide focuses on supporting education professionals, it is specifically geared towards those in the special education sector and/or supporting students going through evaluation for, or already receiving, special education services. While those in special education, including teachers, psychologists, counselors, speech language pathologists, physical and occupational therapists, etc., are all highly trained and qualified in their certified area(s), there is a lack of supportive trainings in understanding students’ cultural background as a component to the discussions and services around special education. Specifically, there is very limited information available for supporting students from Indigenous communities and even fewer resources on the special education population.

This professional development and guide by no means meant to be an all-encompassing resource on the topic of Indigenous students in special education. The overarching goal is to bring awareness, spark conversations, and spur further research to instigate change in our approach to working with and serving Indigenous students in special education. Furthermore, it is important to understand that this professional development has been developed to give a summary of Indigenous histories in relation to education and then focus on the southwest region of the United States as it has been authored by a teacher residing in Arizona.

## **History:**

Indigenous communities globally have suffered great atrocities in the name of colonization. “American Indian/Alaska Native American societies and people have been devastated by disease, warfare, starvations, colonization, forced migration, cultural genocide, racism, and poverty” (Sarche, et al., 2011, p. 3). This has resulted in generations of traumatic experiences,

also known as historical trauma. What is historical trauma? The Administration for Children and Families defines historical trauma as, “Historical trauma is multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural, racial or ethnic group. It is related to major events that oppressed a particular group of people because of their status as oppressed, such as slavery, the Holocaust, forced migration, and the violent colonization of Native Americans” (Administration for Children and Families, 2017).

Understanding and recognizing that historical trauma plays a role in our students' development and their lives outside of the school, is essential for educators. One of the greatest historical traumas experienced by Indigenous communities in America that today's educators need to understand are the boarding schools. Boarding schools were established by missionaries and the federal government in the United States starting in the mid-1800s. The goal of the boarding school framework was to usher in assimilation and conformity to Western civilization under the guise of bringing modern education, skills, and religion to Native Americans who were perceived to be lacking in their quality of life because they did not have “formal” education as defined by Western constructs. The rich culture, traditions, and education practices passed down from generation to generation over centuries within the tribal communities was completely lost on the colonists and newly established federal government (Mejia, 2022).

Initially, Western education was brought to Indigenous communities on their lands occasionally and was mostly through the avenue of missionaries. However, it rapidly changed as the federal government became more involved with what schooling for Native American youth looked like. Soon, buildings were placed on tribal lands for students to attend. Then, students were required to stay all day and overnight to limit the regression of concepts learned. Educators believed the less time students spent with their families and tribal members, the quicker they would assimilate to Western ways to become more civilized. Drastic moves were taken to accomplish this, even building high walls around the school buildings so the students could not even see tribal members or rituals/ceremonies being performed in the distance. Students who were not amiable to teachings were severely punished in the forms of abuse, neglect, and isolation (Sarche, et al., 2011, p. 3-6). Moreover, when tribal leaders and parents pushed back on their children being taken to these boarding schools, many were imprisoned by the government. This chain of events was not singular to a few years or one decade in our country's history, but spanned multiple decades carrying into the mid-20th century. Indigenous communities began to assert their cultural significance and importance in having control over the education of their youth. This resulted in different acts being passed by the United States Congress. In 1972 the Indian Education Act established the Office of Indian Education as well as the National Advisory Council on Indian Education. In 1975, congress finally passed the Indian Self-Determination Act which renewed tribal governments and gave Native Americans the power to manage their own schools. Given this condensed summary of tormentors interactions, it is not hard to understand that this specific chapter of educational history has contributed to the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous communities. Ultimately, the boarding school era has created a figurative wall between the families of Native American students and public educators. It is further distanced by the lack of resources, training, and discussions about these atrocities in education training programs that could help bridge the divide.

Concept of Disability:

Now that we have a historical reference to spring from, it is important to discuss the definition and concept of the term 'disability' as we shift to focus on Indigenous students and special education. The term disability, as defined by the Center for Disease Control (CDC)(2020), "is any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them." For school personnel working in special education, this is the concept of disability we are first introduced to in our education training programs. We then learn about various teaching strategies, resources, therapies, technologies, and more to help students grow through their educational career. Within Indigenous communities, across the world, it is equal parts surprising and fascinating to have researched and found that there really is not a word for disability. When tribal members were further probed about the concept of disability, they shared there were indeed persons in their communities that fit this Western definition; however, they are not viewed in a negative light that the term disability casts from a Western context (Rivas Velarde, 2018).

Further, within many Indigenous societies, members are all viewed as having a purpose and are able to contribute to their community. No matter how small the contribution may seem to Westerners, all persons are valued within Indigenous societies. Persons with disabilities are not viewed as being a burden but conversely their differences and uniqueness are celebrated. Across countries and continents, research has found a similar thread in valuing all tribal members, regardless of their physical or mental attributes. "Indigenous traditional beliefs work to welcome individuals as people first, with a reluctance to identify them as different, impaired, 'deficient' or disabled" (Rivas Velarde, 2018). This perspective completely flips the Westernized concept of disability on its head and by affiliation, special education training as it relates to working with Indigenous students and their families.

#### Medical vs Spiritual vs Mixed Approaches to Treatments:

Commonly in Western discussions and education on disabilities there is a huge spotlight on the medical field's role in a disabled person's life. When Western medical concepts are brought into play it is with a narrow, strict focus of "fixing" or "curing" the disabled person to the highest extent possible. An example would be infants undergoing surgery for cochlear implants to "fix" their hearing loss despite it not being a life-threatening illness. It is often a contentious point of conversation in the deaf community as it is viewed as forcing deaf people to become hearing as if something is wrong with them. Within the context of the deaf community, they view themselves as being whole, not lacking due to their hearing status. However, special educators are often taught within their university programs about how medical treatments and interventions help our students. Often this perspective is also taught as a manner of "coaching" to help work with families on accessing medical care for their students if needed. While this may seem well intentioned, a different lens and pause should be used when considering and/or having discussions with Native American families.

For many Indigenous tribes, Western medical interventions are not always the first sought out treatment or intervention for a person born with a disability. There are a few reasons that play into this decision to not seek Western medical care or support. One reason relates back to the lack of term for disability within many tribal languages. There is not a word for disability

because every person is viewed as an able contributor to the community. Couple this with the concept that children are viewed as gifts and are treasured in Native American communities. So, if all Native American children are born with the view of being a treasured contributor to the tribal whole, what is the need for Western medical diagnosis and interventions? In a study on Indigenous cultures in Australia, New Zealand, and Mexico, researchers were able to summarize similar findings on the view of disability as “seen by participants as an alien concept, and was often referred to as Western or ‘doctors’ language.’ (Rivas Velarde, 2018).

Within Indigenous cultures there is an emphasis on spiritual ties and connection of how the community engages with all members. Those born with disabilities are treated no different. There are a few different perspectives that come into play regarding disabilities occurring and may vary by tribe, clans within the same tribe, and regions. One spiritual view is that the person born with a disability is viewed as gifted and differently-abled vs the negative connotation of disabled. Those holding this belief look at these differences as equipping that person with a unique view of the world that can be shared with the tribe (Gilroy, et al., 2022). Furthering this point, the tribe considers this opportunity to be a great honor that is celebrated.

Separately, within some tribes, clans, or even families of the same tribe there can be a stark contrast spiritually in the belief that a person born with a significant difference is due to a wrongdoing in the past by either the parents, family, or tribe as a whole (Connors & Donnellan, 1993). This is a heavy concept to shoulder; however, the spiritual approach is of great importance. The family and/or tribe as a whole may need to atone for these offenses in a ceremonial form specific to their tribe’s customs and traditions. This can be a short or long process, singular or ongoing. The custom of approaching treatment of disabilities this way is by no way viewed as a complete healing in a Western medical context. This is to be understood as a spiritual healing that will restore balance for the family and/or tribe as a whole. By extension, the person born with the disability is fully healed spiritually and thus able to live their life to full capacity even if Western medical perspectives of “normal” health are not observed.

A mixed approach to treating the spiritual and Western medical diagnosis of an Indigenous person born with a disability is becoming increasingly more common. Younger generations of parents wanting to honor their culture and customs seek the guidance of Healers and Elders in their tribe concerning their child with a disability. Still, they consult with Western medical providers for diagnosis and possible treatments to support their child. An example of this mixed approach would be Western medical practices at Indian Health Service (IHS) locations being rendered but they also allow traditional Singers to come in as part of the patients’ treatment. This is to recognize the need for medical advancements for physical ailments while honoring the cultural perspective of healing the spirit is of equal (if not higher) importance (Connors & Donnellan, 1993). Parents and their extended families with a mixed approach to their child’s disability have a strong respect for their culture and also knowledge of how to obtain access to Western medical care.

#### Roles of Disabled Persons:

Indigenous persons with disabilities all have the ability to contribute to their communities. As shared previously, every member born into the tribe has a purpose and is able to add to the whole

of the community. Roles for persons with disabilities vary to meet their abilities. These roles may appear as minute in a Western context but are celebrated in Indigenous cultures. For example, an Indigenous child that may have been delayed in self-help skills, such as toileting or self-dressing, may require support from family members for years beyond typical Western growth milestones. However, if the child becomes independent in a self-help skill, it is celebrated. It is viewed as taking a responsibility off the plate of a family member and a step towards independence (Connors & Donnellan, 1993). Likewise, Indigenous persons are taught skills and customs of cultural significance to their tribe just like all other members. One important custom is the care and ownership of animals, which is also viewed as a status symbol and/or currency. In the Navajo nation, one report told of an autistic man who owned livestock within his family's herd. He was not able to fully take care of these animals independently, but when any profit was made from the animals (i.e., wool sold from the sheep) that were specifically designated as "his," those monies were seen as his contribution to the family's income. This view of shared income within the family and contributing also counts for any monies paid to disabled individuals via the federal and/or tribal governments (Connors & Donnellan, 1993).

One account of an Indigenous young man in an unnamed tribe, deemed a "slow learner" by Western educators and social workers, described him as an errand-runner for the eldering in his village. He would collect money and go run every day errands for those who could not complete the tasks themselves. For example, he would get groceries or pick up medicine and bring it to those in need of this type of assistance. This was a great service to his tribe and a valuable skill. This young man was never viewed as being "unwell" or having an angry nature. Unfortunately, the social workers came to his home to remove him and place him in a government facility to house disabled persons. This traumatic removal made the young man rightfully upset which spurred an aggressive altercation with the social worker. He was further labeled as "dangerous" and placed in an institution for disabled persons who were violent. The members of his tribe elaborated that the removal of this young man from his village not only ruined his life but adversely impacted the many people he helped (Gilroy, et al., 2021).

#### Special Education Services:

Special education has a very rigorous process of identification in the public school systems. It requires schools to do everything they can to help students who are struggling to keep up with their peers through interventions prior to starting the special education evaluation processes. If through the intervention process collected data shows students making zero to minimal progress, then the intervention team can refer those students to the special education team. At that time, the special education team will work with families to initiate the special education evaluation. They will use their current data, additional assessment tools, and observations to get a better picture of the student's abilities. After that has been done thoroughly, the team reconvenes with the student's family to discuss results and make a determination of special education eligibility based on the federal qualifying categories. The qualifying categories under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, preschool severe delay, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment

(Arizona Department of Education, 2022). Each category has specific requirements that special education teams need to demonstrate a student meets through their evaluation process. Parents are part of the special education process and decision and can even reject the determination. However, many parents rely on the school as the experts and rarely dispute evaluation findings.

The history of special education and treatment of disabled persons within Western culture has not been a pretty one. It has only been just over 30 years since the passing of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and almost 50 years since the initial passing of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act. These pieces of legislation were enacted to create more equity and access for persons with disabilities. Prior to this, many were grossly mistreated and suffered atrocities in institutions that had claimed to be the only place to help them live a better life. These institutions, much like boarding schools for Indigenous students, were unsanitary, separated disabled persons from their families, used cruel punishments, and conducted medical treatments including forced sterilization. The eugenics movement was seen as a driving cause for the development of institutions to keep the disabled separate from the general population because they were deemed unfit to integrate and/or reproduce (Bain De Los Santos, 1-3). While we have thankfully done away with institutions, it has only been recently that concepts of least restrictive environment and integrating students with all levels of disability in public schools have been put into practice. Even the ADA had to be amended in 2008 to further strengthen it to add antidiscrimination language because of persons with disabilities receiving unfair treatment (Bain De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019). Despite all this growth, it is a struggle for many public schools to recognize the value persons with disabilities have because they are immediately looked at through a Western construct of “disabled rather than considering at all that they can and do offer. Parents, guardians, and advocates battle every day in schools across the United States for their right to free and appropriate public education (FAPE) so their child can receive access to education (Bain De Los Santos, 5-6).

Given the overview of the special education process, it is important to take time to note the types of evaluation tools, in generality, used to assess students’ abilities. Many of the interventions and formal assessments are normed on white children with lower percentages of minorities represented, some not even at all. Yet, many minorities have a higher representation in special education compared to their white peers. A specific disregard to cultural and linguistic differences has a direct adverse impact for Indigenous students (Artiles, 437). Not accounting for the cultural differences and languages in the development of evaluation tools, including the intervention process, causes disparities in allowing students to show their true abilities within the public school construct. Therefore, creating a situation of over-determining Indigenous students as having a disability in need of special education services. Such is the case for Native American students in Arizona. Native American students make up only 4% of the student population in our state yet they make up 16-17% of the special education demographic compared to around 13% for other ethnicities (Office of Indian Education, 2020). This is an inequity found across the United States. One example of a disability category where Indigenous students are of a dominant representation is for specific learning disability (SLD). Indigenous students make up 7.5% of the special education students found eligible under the SLD category compared to 4.2% of the general population (Sarche, et al., 2011).



During the special education process, from intervention to eligibility, families are required to be an equal team member with the school. Parents/guardians have a unique perspective of how their child functions outside of the public school constructs. This is valued information collected by the special education team, typically in the form of a questionnaire and/or interview, for the evaluation and helps to make eligibility determinations. However, in the public school setting, educators typically only focus on discussions with parents/guardians and rarely take into account additional family members that may have a central role in the upbringing of the student. For Indigenous families, this Western perspective of who has the main child rearing responsibilities can lead to limited or missed information on how a child's true function and what their role is within their family and community outside of school. Specifically for Indigenous students, many have grandparents, aunts, and uncles who take primary caregiving roles for a variety of reasons (Sarche, et al., 2011). Some of the caregiving roles are part of the cultural makeup for different tribes. For example, in the Hopi tribe the aunts of children play a huge role in their upbringing from the day of birth through adulthood. As educators in Arizona, where many Indigenous students are from the Hopi nation, it would be vital for having a true picture of the child's functions, behaviors, roles, and responsibilities, to talk with their aunt(s) who spend such a great deal of time with them. Unfortunately, if the parents/guardians do not express this information to the schools, there is no way for them to know that extended family members take on these roles and responsibilities. If educators took the time to ask simple additional questions about extended family and their contributions to the students' upbringing, this could help not only the special education process, but create stronger relationships between Indigenous families and public schools.

Moreover, Indigenous families have a unique dynamic with access to services for disabled persons compared to other ethnicities in the United States. Since tribal nations have their own sovereign lands, they also have their own services including hospitals. There are also federal and state government resources specifically directed to Indigenous persons to support a variety of needs. This means Indigenous students in public schools may receive special education services and therapies at school but also have a variety of additional services outside of school (Sarche, et al., 2011). Sadly, the likelihood of cross-communication between professionals providing these services is nearly nonexistent. This may be attributed to high turnover in the positions that typically serve disabled populations (i.e. teachers, counselors, speech language pathologists, psychologists, etc.) currently experienced across the country. Another likely reason would be laws preventing schools, hospitals, and other institutions from sharing sensitive information, such as medical records and therapies, without parental/guardian consent. This can easily be remedied by a consent form; however, there needs to be one available for schools to use, their personnel need to know it is an option, and most importantly how to have a conversation with Indigenous families about outside services to see where collaboration can be beneficial for student outcomes.

An opposing situation to an abundance of resources would be the lack of access to services due to the nature of remote locations where many Indigenous communities reside. Indigenous students in special education may qualify for additional support beyond what schools can offer, but families may not have the ability to get to the location of those resources. Indigenous students in rural communities may spend a long time on buses for access to public education and may not have the time to go for additional appointments as easily as students in urban areas.

Educators need to be aware of how far Indigenous students travel to come to school, how that may impact them, and how that travel time may limit their ability to make it to additional services.

How educators can improve:

The professional development component linked in the engagement section of this paper is a starting point for educators being exposed to the need for culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students within the specific constructs of special education. Culturally responsive schooling is a practice beneficial for all learners; however, understanding the vital role of culture when considering special education is becoming an increasingly hot topic within the field. Educators and staff supporting special education students should be considerate of cultural differences for their students and how that plays a role in their education access as well as needs. This can be a cumbersome task individually. Taking advantage of community resources is a great way to learn more about students' cultures. Does your district have Native American teachers or community liaisons that would be willing to share about the tribal cultures? Ask your principal or other leaders about which tribal nations are represented in your school. Once you know which tribe(s) may be represented in your classroom and campus then a good first step is to look up that tribe's website. Each tribal nation has a website with a variety of information and a way to contact them with questions or ideas for integrating Indigenous cultural activities in your classroom/school. The websites may also have a calendar of events with activities or celebrations that are open to the public. Taking small steps to learn about others' culture goes a long way in building bridges to support the needs of all students.

In regards to the special education process, including interventions, it is critical for cultural differences to be discussed and taken into consideration for Indigenous students. This is not something to lightly consider independently while trudging on with standardized assessments or surveys. It is essential to involve others such as parents, guardians, or significant family members to learn about the student's home life and culture. This will help to understand the student better and develop adjustments in lessons to be culturally responsive. It may be that these adjustments will show more of the student's true abilities rather than standardized activities. Brainstorm with colleagues on ways that assessments and parent surveys can be tweaked or completely restructured to be relevant for Indigenous students and their families. Finally, it is paramount to the successful building for relationships with Indigenous families that they understand the special education process in totality. Given the previously discussed histories of blatant misleading of the true goals of public education for Indigenous students, it is vital to build trusting relationships with Indigenous families to have a true picture of the student's abilities. Having a relationship based in mutual respect and trust will help families open up about their child more accurately so schools know how to better support students that may be struggling with strict Western teaching practices.

### **Student Engagement**

This culturally responsive professional development culmination project is in the form of a professional development geared towards education staff that work with students in (or going through evaluation for) special education. The engagement section for this project will look different compared to that for projects geared toward a unit for students. This professional

development will be formatted to be delivered in person or virtually to reach as many educators as possible. Ideally, this professional development will be given in person with special education staff of all levels present to gain the most benefit for their particular campus and/or district. However, given the nature and scope of current world affairs with the COVID-19 Pandemic still looming, some may prefer to take professional development virtually. It is suggested that this be presented virtually in a team-meeting platform (Google Meets, Zoom, Microsoft teams, etc.) where a department lead can pause at appropriate times to discuss the presentation as it applies to their campus/district.

Objectives:

Educators will...

1. Understand the concept of historical trauma and its impact on Indigenous students
2. Have a clear understanding of the difference in definitions and concepts of “disability” between Western and Indigenous cultures
3. Learn about medical treatments (Western) vs spiritual healings/rituals/ceremonies (Indigenous) and the perspective and acceptance of both/either within tribal communities
4. Learn about the Indigenous perspective on special education in public schools (process, qualification, services, etc.)
5. Create action items to review the special education process to integrate culturally relevant information for Indigenous students and parent/guardian/family interactions

Link below is to the professional development presentation. This training should count for 2-hours of professional development. This will allocate sufficient time to not only go through the presentation but also allow time for questions, participant quiz, and collaboration time for action items. There are engagement review questions and reflection pieces built into the presentation to help participants digest and consider the information they are learning.

[The Indigenous Perspective on Disability & Special Education in Public Schools Presentation](#)

### **Assessment**

To assess what has been learned from this professional development there is a link below to a Google Form formatted as a quiz. Participants should take the quiz at the end of the presentation in order to make sure all information was understood. If there are questions stemming from the assessment or confusion in question wording, it is the intention that the participants feel comfortable asking questions to help them complete the quiz with a passing score of 80% or higher. Open notes or retakes are permitted as the goal is to demonstrate attentiveness to the subject matter, not storing information for the short term just to pass the quiz for professional development credit without retaining learned concepts.

Given the goal of creating awareness, reflection, consideration, and change, it would be beneficial for leadership to implement further assessment benchmarks to ensure application of learned concepts from this professional development. For example, professional or campus

goals related to reassessing the practices of working with Indigenous students in relation to special education (and/or the process of interventions and/or evaluation). This may be in the form of revisiting questionnaires given to parents as part of the intervention and evaluation process to gather details of how students function in their home environment. Many of these questionnaires are very general yet from a lens of typical Western homes such as listing chores, extracurriculars, or interests that do not align with the cultural activities and traditions Indigenous students experience. Additionally, staff administering evaluation tools to assess Indigenous students in regards to potential intervention or special education needs, may make it a goal to revisit the evaluation tools for cultural relevance. Lastly, yet very much a resource to the previously mentioned goal suggestions, staff completing this professional development may elect to collaboratively work as a team or campus to increase involvement with the school from Indigenous families as well as tribal leaders. It is important for families to feel included on school campuses and even more so for students in (or being evaluated for) special education. What can your campus/district do to make Indigenous families feel included and valued? How does your district make sure Indigenous families understand the special education process and their rights aside from giving the Procedural Safeguards at meetings? Considering these goals and questions, leadership could focus on measurable action items to assess their teams applying what was learned from this professional development.

#### [Indigenous Persons Perspective on Disability & Special Education Quiz](#)

When using the above Google Form, **please make a copy of the form** to administer to your team and keep as record for your professional development credit. Attempting to edit the original form will alter it for all future users. An alternative option is to have staff take a screenshot of their quiz result and send it to the person leading the professional development. This form will not be reviewed or certified by the author, rather it is simply a measurement tool to receive potential professional development credit to be determined and offered by the district sharing it. A campus and/or district may elect to not administer the quiz in favor of collaboratively developing measurable action items or goals for their staff to address concerning the special education process, implementation, and teachings of Indigenous students.

## Resources

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