

# Creating Indigenous Activities in Indigenous Schools

By Evangeline Warwick

Institute for Native Educators

Indian Community School Leadership

Author Note: Evangeline Warwick is an Dean of Students for grades K-5 at Whiteriver Unified School District. Correspondence about this guide can be addressed to: Evangeline Warwick, PO 190, Whiteriver, Arizona 85941. Email Contact: [Evangeline.warwick@wusd.us](mailto:Evangeline.warwick@wusd.us)

## Context

*Shi Evangeline Warwick gonzee, shi Tugain nshii, shi Chilwozh gonshłij, shi The University of Arizona yu óltag, shi Whiteriver Unfied School Districtl na'izlig.*

My name is Evangeline Warwick, and I am proud to be of the White-Water Clan. I reside in Whiteriver, Arizona, and serve as an Apache Educator within the Whiteriver Unified School District, where I work across all three elementary schools. I am a graduate of the University of Arizona and have dedicated my life to education, spanning from early childhood programs to higher education.

Throughout my journey, I have embraced many roles—mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, sister, and aunt—each shaping my understanding of family, community, and the power of learning. Among these, the most profound and fulfilling has been my role as a grandmother and great-grandmother, for there is no greater honor or joy than being called “Grandma,” shiwóyé.

Fort Apache is my community. I was born in Fort Apache, but my parents moved away to go to college. In addition to growing up and coming back to Fort Apache, I have lived in Kentucky, Texas, and New Mexico. I left the reservation at three years old speaking Apache and returned at ten years old with a hillbilly-Texan accent and was no longer speaking Apache. After returning to the Apache Reservation, I finished fourth through twelfth grade at home then left for college.

After two years of college, I returned home, married, and had my second son. I started working as a teaching assistant at a junior high school. After working for two years, I wanted to return to college because I witnessed teachers calling our students dumb and stupid. I knew I could do a better job. After twenty -years of working and going back to college many times I completed college and taught at our local high school.

The positions I have held are teaching assistant, Head Start teacher, Day Care Director, Tribal Youth Council Coordinator, Girls Camp Director, Tribal Scholarship Coordinator, certified English Teacher, Counselor for Higher Education, Apache Language Teacher, GED teacher for NPC, & Upward Bound teacher for NAU (Northern Arizona University). After many years of teaching, I decided I could make an even greater impact by becoming an administrator. Through an opportunity that came about, I took advantage and went back to school to receive my educational leadership degree and certification. After becoming an administrator, I held the position of Assistant Principal, Educational Specialist-Reading Coach, Principal-Elementary School, Academic Coach, Substitute teacher, Apache Language Curriculum Developer, Assistant Principal at a BIE school, Principal at a BIE school, and now Dean of Student for the three elementary schools in the Whiteriver Unified School District.



Located in eastern Arizona on the White Mountain Apache Reservation, the Whiteriver Unified School District (WUSD) stands as a vital center of learning, culture, and community. The district comprises five schools, including Alchesay High School, Canyon Day Junior High School, and three elementary schools—Whiteriver Elementary, Cradleboard Elementary, and Seven Mile Elementary School. In addition, WUSD operates a preschool program serving students with disabilities, ensuring that all children within the community have access to quality early education.

The Whiteriver Unified School District is committed to providing the highest quality educational experience for every student through innovative and culturally responsive programs. Among these are school-wide federal programs, Indian Education initiatives, a K–3 and middle school At-Risk program, and robust offerings in vocational and fine arts education. The district also supports students through Alternative Education programs, Special Education services, and comprehensive Dropout Prevention projects that promote academic persistence and success.

Equally important, WUSD emphasizes the preservation and revitalization of Apache culture and language as central components of the educational experience. Cultural integration occurs both within the classroom and through extracurricular activities designed to strengthen identity, pride, and community engagement. Many classrooms are supported by Apache teaching assistants, whose presence ensures that cultural knowledge, linguistic continuity, and community values remain integral to daily instruction and student learning.

Through these collective efforts, the Whiteriver Unified School District continues to foster academic excellence, cultural pride, and holistic development for all learners, preparing them to thrive both within and beyond the Apache homeland.

Da go Te'



Whiteriver Unified School District proudly supports the Apache people by implementing the culture into the curriculum.

Some people think our ancestors once lived in Alaska and Western Canada. They also believe the Apache's left Alaska and Canada generations ago and arrived in the four corners area 500 -1000 years ago.

We Apache do not believe we migrated from what are now Alaska and Canada. We believe we have lived here forever. Apaches once roamed all over the Southwest, they were nomads. The children were taught by their parents how to survive. We now live in Eastern Arizona.

Today, Apaches live on the reservation and off. We work as teachers, nurses, doctors, policemen, firemen, cashiers, councilmen, and at the lumber mill. The San Carlos Apache Reservation is south of our reservation. The Black River and the White River join together to make the Salt River. The Black River and the Salt River are the southern borders of the White Mountain Apache Indian Reservation.

### **Rationale**

My vision and passion are grounded in the belief that Indigenous knowledge must be preserved, revitalized, and actively integrated into school systems. I seek to gather and systematize Indigenous knowledge, culturally relevant activities, and community-based practices to strengthen learning experiences for Indigenous students. My goal is to develop a comprehensive guide for educators and teaching assistants that provides culturally responsive ideas, digital resources, and professional development opportunities tailored to staff working in Indigenous-serving schools.

### ***Culturally Responsive Development in Schools***

Our school community continues to explore ways to deepen culturally responsive engagement within our classrooms and school-wide practices. One valuable framework for this effort is the Culturally Responsive Schooling in Indigenous Serving Schools (CRSISS) model, which provides a structured approach to identifying both the strengths and gaps in integrating Apache and other Indigenous cultural elements into curriculum and pedagogy.

Although significant scholarship exists on culturally responsive, relevant, sustaining, and revitalizing education (Castagno, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2017), there remains a critical need for practical tools specifically designed for Indigenous-serving schools. Current literature highlights the benefits of culturally grounded education, asserting that students learn more effectively and achieve higher academic outcomes when instruction connects to their lived experiences, aligns with their cultural norms, and is guided by an ethic of care and social justice (Banks & Banks, 2001; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2003).

Research further affirms that educators who know and value Indigenous youth, speak their language, understand their culture, and participate in local communities deliver more effective and meaningful instruction (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; McCarty & Lee, 2014; McCarty et al., 1997; Reyhner, 1992; Yazzie, 1999).

The scholarship of Indigenous education—especially when combined with insights from Indigenous scholars across multiple disciplines—provides a powerful foundation for addressing tribal sovereignty, self-determination, colonization, assimilation, and the unique government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the United States (Brayboy, 2005; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Grande, 2000; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Robbins, 1992). Equally vital is the wisdom of tribal education leaders, reservation teachers, and community members, who have long known what is required for Indigenous youth to succeed academically without losing their cultural sense of self.

Despite the rich literature on culturally responsive education, there is still limited understanding of how responsiveness is enacted daily by teachers in Native-serving schools. My work seeks to bridge this gap through practical, research-informed strategies that empower educators to sustain Indigenous identity while fostering academic achievement.

### ***The Cultural Foundations of Education***

At its core, education is a cultural endeavor—one deeply influenced by local traditions, histories, and community values. For generations, Indigenous communities across the Americas and the Pacific have viewed education as inseparable from place, language, and culture. However, through colonization and globalization, Western-style education systems displaced Indigenous knowledge systems and imposed values that often conflicted with Indigenous worldviews. The legacy of this disruption includes the devastating effects of boarding schools, cultural suppression, and the intergenerational trauma that persists among Indigenous families today.

Yet, a new movement of revitalization is taking hold. Across Indigenous nations, educators and leaders are reclaiming education as a tool for healing, empowerment, and self-determination. Through culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies, schools are once again embracing the diversity of Indigenous knowledge systems and reconnecting learning to identity, community, and environment. These approaches affirm what Paris and Alim (2017) describe as the dual responsibility of educators—to help students sustain the cultural and linguistic

competence of their communities while also offering access to the skills necessary for success in broader society.

My vision aligns with this movement of reclamation and transformation. By creating a guide for culturally responsive teaching in Indigenous schools, I aim to support educators in designing learning experiences that are academically rigorous, culturally grounded, and emotionally restorative. Such work not only improves educational outcomes for Indigenous students but also strengthens cultural pride, community engagement, and the continuity of knowledge across generations.

Education, in its truest form, is not merely the transmission of knowledge—it is the shaping of values, identity, and relationships within a specific worldview. The contrasts between Western educational approaches and traditional Indigenous approaches common across the Pacific reveal fundamentally different philosophies about what it means to learn, to know, and to grow.

Western education, shaped by industrial, colonial, and Enlightenment paradigms, has long emphasized individual achievement, standardized measurement, and universal application. In contrast, Indigenous education systems across the Pacific—and indeed in many Native communities globally—are collectivist, relational, experiential, and place-based, centering community well-being, cultural continuity, and harmony with the environment.

### ***Core Features of Western Education***

Western models of schooling have historically prioritized certain defining features:

1. **Individualized Learning:**

Western education often views learning as an individual pursuit, where each student is personally responsible for mastering knowledge and demonstrating competence. This model privileges self-sufficiency, personal success, and competition over collaboration and interdependence.

2. **Standards-Based Assessment:**

Student learning is frequently measured through standardized testing and performance benchmarks that reflect state or national standards. These assessments are designed to quantify learning outcomes, emphasizing uniformity and comparability across large populations.

3. **Universal Knowledge and Transferability:**

The Western paradigm assumes that knowledge should be universally applicable, focusing on abstract concepts, facts, and processes that can be transferred to multiple contexts. Education is often framed as a vehicle for career preparation, economic productivity, and individual advancement, rather than communal well-being or cultural preservation.

While these features continue to dominate educational systems throughout the Pacific region, there is a growing movement among educators, leaders, and communities to reimagine education through Indigenous lenses—infusing traditional principles into contemporary schooling.

## *Indigenous and Pacific Educational Perspectives*

Across the Pacific, traditional systems of learning are grounded in community, relationality, and lived experience. Education is not confined to classrooms; it is embedded in family, environment, spirituality, and culture. Increasingly, schools are weaving these values into curriculum and pedagogy in ways that both revitalize Indigenous traditions and enhance student engagement and achievement.

### **1. Learning as a Collective Endeavor:**

In Indigenous and Pacific communities, learning is understood as a shared, interdependent process. Knowledge is built collaboratively for the benefit of the whole community, rather than for individual gain.

For example, in American Samoa, high school students have undertaken the construction of a traditional Samoan fale (house) under the mentorship of a local carpenter. The project unites cultural practice with academic learning—integrating math, science, language, and teamwork—while producing something of tangible value for the community. Such approaches teach students that success is measured not by personal advancement alone, but by collective accomplishment and contribution.

### **2. Culturally Grounded and Alternative Assessments:**

In contrast to standardized tests, many Indigenous models of education embrace demonstration-based or project-based assessments that reflect real-world learning.

A prominent example is found in Hawai‘i’s Kaiapuni Assessment of Education Outcomes (KĀ‘EO) for Hawaiian language immersion students. This assessment framework centers language, culture, and Indigenous intelligence as core to evaluating student success. Rather than testing abstract knowledge, KĀ‘EO affirms the value of learning that is culturally rooted, linguistically authentic, and socially meaningful.

### **3. Place-Based and Experiential Knowledge:**

Indigenous education emphasizes place-based learning, where the local environment and cultural landscape serve as living classrooms.

In the Marshall Islands, teachers integrate lessons on ocean ecology, marine biology, and human migration by using the ocean as both metaphor and medium. Elders guide students in building miniature voyaging vessels, passing down navigational knowledge central to Marshallese identity.

Similarly, in Palau, where culture and environment are deeply intertwined, schools have woven conservation education into science, mathematics, and social studies curricula. Palau High School even replaced its long-standing General Science course with Environmental Science, aligning modern instruction with traditional ecological stewardship.

### **4. Intergenerational Learning and Storytelling:**

Storytelling and genealogy play a central role in Indigenous pedagogy, reinforcing kinship, history, and moral instruction.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a high school teacher in Hawai‘i assigned students to write about their family histories and ancestral genealogies, transforming isolation into a period of reconnection. This activity not only deepened family bonds but also provided

the teacher with insight into students' cultural backgrounds, enriching instruction and mutual understanding.

### ***Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge through Education***

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Pacific and its partners have championed these local principles, collaborating with schools to design research, training, and coaching that honor and apply Indigenous knowledge systems. This partnership model prioritizes learning from, rather than imposing upon, local communities, ensuring that educational practice is both responsive and sustainable.

Educators serving Pacific Islander and other Indigenous students—whether in their homelands or diaspora—are encouraged to draw upon these Indigenous frameworks by:

- Exploring students' cultural values and how these shape learning behaviors and motivations;
- Redesigning instruction to incorporate collective, experiential, and community-based learning; and
- Creating opportunities for students to connect authentically with their cultural identities, languages, and ancestral knowledge systems.

The distinction between Western and Indigenous approaches is not simply pedagogical—it is philosophical and moral. Western education often prioritizes measurable outcomes, while Indigenous education prioritizes balance, identity, and relational responsibility. As more educators across the Pacific and beyond embrace Indigenous models, schools are becoming spaces of cultural resurgence, collective empowerment, and educational sovereignty.

By integrating Indigenous principles into modern education, we are not rejecting Western methods; rather, we are restoring balance—ensuring that learning once again reflects the collective wisdom, spirit, and resilience of the communities it serves.

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) network continues to advance the understanding and application of Indigenous principles of learning and culturally responsive educational practices across diverse communities. Through research, collaboration, and practitioner-focused tools, REL Pacific and its partner laboratories seek to broaden the adoption of culturally grounded pedagogies that affirm identity, strengthen community ties, and improve educational outcomes for Indigenous and Pacific Island students.

Below is a selection of key REL resources that provide valuable insights, frameworks, and practical strategies for educators, administrators, and researchers dedicated to building culturally sustaining schools.

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## 1. Supporting Pacific Island Communities Through Place-Based Education

*REL Pacific*

This blog post explores how place-based education can personalize learning by connecting students to their local environments, cultures, and communities. The resource highlights examples from Pacific Island schools where educators integrate environmental knowledge, local traditions, and community collaboration to enhance engagement and academic relevance.

URL: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Blog/70066>

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## 2. Working Respectfully with Indigenous Communities Around Data, Research, and Evidence

*REL West*

This resource offers essential guidance for state and district education leaders seeking to form equitable partnerships with tribal governments and Indigenous communities. It provides strategies for using data and evidence in ways that are culturally respectful, collaborative, and beneficial to Native students, supporting sovereignty and community-driven educational improvement.

URL: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Resource/100579>

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## 3. Understanding the Needs and Experiences of Alaska Native English Learner Students

*REL Northwest*

Presented as a visual infographic, this resource synthesizes research on the academic and linguistic experiences of Alaska Native English Learners (ELs). It emphasizes culturally sustaining practices that foster both heritage language maintenance and English proficiency, guiding future policy and instructional design to promote equitable achievement.

URL: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Resource/60137>

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## 4. Culturally Responsive Assessment: Goals, Challenges, and Implications

*REL Pacific*

This infographic highlights key considerations for creating and implementing culturally responsive assessments that reflect students' lived experiences and community values. It underscores the importance of balanced assessment systems that promote equity and authenticity while recognizing the diversity of student strengths and ways of knowing.

URL: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Resource/100402>

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## 5. Culturally Sustaining Teaching Practices for Multilingual Students

### *REL Pacific*

This infographic introduces a series of culturally sustaining instructional strategies to help educators create inclusive, empowering classrooms for multilingual learners. The practices encourage teachers to honor students' cultural knowledge, linguistic assets, and community narratives as integral components of academic learning.

URL: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Resource/70106>

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## 6. Implementing Inclusive Education through Culturally Responsive Practices

### *REL Appalachia*

This “REL Corner” publication provides educators and school leaders with tools to cultivate inclusivity through cultural responsiveness. It includes frameworks for reflection, classroom application, and schoolwide implementation to foster welcoming environments for students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

URL: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Resource/-89850>

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## 7. Teaching Diverse Learners Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

### *REL Mid-Atlantic*

This fact sheet defines culturally responsive pedagogy and outlines evidence-based classroom strategies that promote equity and belonging among diverse learners. It offers practical guidance for teachers seeking to implement responsive teaching practices and align instruction with students' cultural and community contexts.

URL: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Resource/4665>

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Together, these REL resources form a rich foundation for educators seeking to move beyond awareness toward active implementation of Indigenous and culturally responsive practices. By integrating these frameworks into policy, instruction, and assessment, schools can foster academic excellence, cultural relevance, and community empowerment—ensuring that every learner is seen, heard, and valued within their educational journey.

### **Albuquerque Public Schools**

To meaningfully support and sustain Indigenous education, Albuquerque Public Schools should embed Indigenous cultural activities within its schoolwide strategic plan and curriculum framework. These activities must not exist as isolated events but as an ongoing,

integrated approach to teaching and learning that honors Indigenous identity, values, and community.

The following strategies outline a comprehensive approach for integrating Indigenous culture, history, and knowledge systems throughout the educational experience:

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## 1. Cultural and Community Engagement

- **Guest Speakers and Elders:** Host regular presentations by **tribal elders, community leaders, and Indigenous scholars** from diverse nations to share traditional knowledge, oral histories, and contemporary issues.
  - **Field Trips to Local Historical Sites:** Organize visits to **tribal landmarks, cultural centers, and historical sites** to strengthen students' sense of place and community connection.
  - **Artifact Day:** Facilitate a collaborative event where **students, families, and community members** bring artifacts, stories, and personal histories to share.
  - **Cultural Food Celebrations:** Incorporate **traditional foods** into school events and lessons throughout the year, promoting cultural pride and intergenerational learning.
  - **Cultural Dance and Song Programs:** Develop a **student performance group** that learns and presents traditional songs and dances, fostering cultural expression and public appreciation.
  - **Field Trips to Other Schools:** Enable cultural exchange by **performing at other schools**, demonstrating pride in Indigenous traditions while promoting cultural awareness among peers.
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## 2. Curriculum and Instructional Integration

- **Classroom Cultural Displays:** Each classroom should develop **monthly Indigenous-themed displays** that highlight student projects, cultural traditions, and relevant learning activities.
- **Student-Created Media and Literature:** Encourage students to produce **poetry, stories, digital media, songs, and short films** celebrating Indigenous heritage, identity, and resilience.
- **Historical Photo Research Projects:** Students can analyze historical photographs, documenting their research on context, people, locations, and cultural significance.
- **Cultural Games and Activities:** Partner with **local elders and knowledge keepers** to teach students traditional games and physical activities rooted in Indigenous practices.
- **Cultural Clothing and Fashion Projects:** Support creative expression through **designing traditional or modern Indigenous clothing**, culminating in a fashion show or art exhibition.
- **Cultural Jewelry and Art Projects:** Incorporate **beadwork, carving, pottery, and other art forms** into classroom instruction to connect students with ancestral creativity.

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### 3. School Environment and Visual Representation

- **Murals and Artwork:** Commission **murals, posters, sculptures, and student art** that reflect Indigenous heritage, values, and community contributions.
- **School Museum or Cultural Center:** Establish a **student-managed school museum or cultural exhibit space** showcasing Indigenous art, history, and student projects.
- **Schoolwide Cultural Showcase:** Host an annual **Cultural Showcase** where students display projects, perform traditional music and dance, and present cultural research to the community.

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### 4. Family and Community Collaboration

- **Family Tree Project:** Encourage students to **explore family lineages** and oral histories, connecting their personal narratives to the broader tribal story.
- **Community/School Newsletter:** Develop a **student-led publication** featuring interviews, event coverage, and stories from community members, reinforcing literacy and civic engagement.
- **Parent and Community Participation:** Involve parents and community members as **mentors, co-teachers, and cultural resource guides** to strengthen school-community partnerships.

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### 5. Leadership, Staffing, and Higher Education Pathways

- **Hiring Indigenous Staff:** Prioritize the **recruitment and retention of Indigenous educators, paraprofessionals, and cultural liaisons** to serve as role models and ensure cultural authenticity.
- **College Field Trips:** Provide **postsecondary exposure opportunities** for Indigenous students to explore universities and colleges with Native American programs and support services.
- **Professional Development:** Offer **teacher training on culturally responsive pedagogy**, Indigenous learning frameworks, and effective community collaboration.

Embedding Indigenous cultural activities within the schoolwide plan ensures that Indigenous knowledge is not treated as an extracurricular or symbolic effort, but as a living, dynamic component of daily education. By implementing these strategies, Albuquerque Public Schools can create an environment where Indigenous students thrive academically, culturally, and spiritually, while all students gain a deeper respect for the histories, traditions, and ongoing contributions of Indigenous peoples.

*National Indian Education Association (NIEA): Professional Learning and Development*

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is dedicated to advancing comprehensive, culture-based education for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students through innovative and transformative professional learning opportunities. Recognizing that educators play a central role in shaping equitable learning environments, NIEA provides both virtual and in-person professional development (PD) programs designed to strengthen culturally grounded practices across all educational systems.

### *Purpose and Focus*

NIEA's professional learning and development initiatives are built upon a foundation of Indigenous knowledge systems, evidence-based research, and community engagement. The programs focus on aligning educational policy, instructional practices, and leadership development with culturally responsive and trauma-informed frameworks that honor the identities and experiences of Native learners.

These trainings emphasize the importance of:

- **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Integrating Native histories, values, and languages into daily teaching to foster belonging and relevance.
- **Trauma-Informed Education:** Understanding the historical and intergenerational impacts of trauma and creating learning environments that promote safety, healing, and resilience.
- **Community-Based Approaches:** Building authentic partnerships with Native families, elders, and community organizations to support holistic student development.
- **Policy and Systems Change:** Aligning institutional policies and educational standards with the principles of sovereignty, self-determination, and equity.

### *Customized Professional Development Opportunities*

NIEA offers customized training sessions designed to meet the unique needs of schools, districts, tribal education departments, and community-based organizations. Each session integrates research-driven content with Indigenous educational philosophies, ensuring that participants not only gain knowledge but also develop practical strategies to implement culturally sustaining practices in their classrooms and institutions.

Whether conducted virtually or on-site, NIEA's professional development sessions are facilitated by experienced Native educators, researchers, and cultural practitioners who bring both academic expertise and lived experience to their work.

### *Commitment to Educational Transformation*

Through its professional learning programs, NIEA continues to advance its vision of an education system where Native students thrive academically while remaining firmly rooted in their cultural heritage. By equipping educators with the tools, understanding, and confidence to teach from a culturally responsive and community-centered perspective, NIEA empowers schools to become true partners in sustaining Native knowledge, identity, and success.

## ***NIEA'S APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PRIORTIZES***

- **Facilitating** reflection, relationship building, and responsible action-taking within PD spaces.
- **Centering** Indigenous knowledge systems, pedagogies, and methodologies for learning.
- **Using** resources and research created by and with Native people and nations,
- **Strengthening** connections between language, culture, and education to improve learning systems.
- **Emphasizing** a Whole Child approach to meeting the needs of Native students and communities.
- **Recognizing** and affirming education sovereignty for Native Nations.

### **NIEA, Upcoming PD Opportunities**

- Connecting New Native Books & Bylines to the classroom.  
January 27, 2026, 3:30 PM MDT

### **NIEA, Past PD**

- Native Authors for Young Readers: Stories and Voices for the Classrooms
- A Conversation on Indigenous Place and Worldview IN & OUT of the classroom with Educator Day Keynote Author Christine M'Lot
- Building Resilient Students: Culturally Grounded SEL and Prevention Strategies
- Native Educator Program Showcase:
  - ✓ Institutions with Native Support Systems Panel Discussion
  - ✓ Native-Centered Program Panel Discussion
  - ✓ Tribal Colleges and University Panel Discussion
- When Indigenous students are classified as EL in schools: Context, opportunities, and Dilemmas
- NIEA & Heart drum/ Haper Collins Presents "Meet the Author"
- 2023 NIEA Book Club Featuring Angeline Bouley
- Book Club Part 2

## **National Indian Education Association (NIEA)**

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is the nation's leading organization dedicated to advancing comprehensive, culture-based educational opportunities for Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. Founded in 1969–1970 by a coalition of visionary Native educators, NIEA emerged from a shared determination to address systemic inequities and to create educational pathways that honor and sustain Native identities, languages, and worldviews.

Since its founding, NIEA has remained steadfast in its core mission and guiding principles, which include:

1. **Collaboration and Professional Unity:** Bringing together Native educators, administrators, and community leaders to collectively improve schools and elevate the quality of education for Native children.
2. **Cultural and Linguistic Preservation:** Promoting the protection, revitalization, and continued development of **Native languages, traditions, and cultural practices** as essential components of student learning and identity.
3. **Policy Advocacy and Leadership:** Developing and implementing strategies to **influence local, state, and federal education policy**, ensuring that Native voices and perspectives are represented at every level of decision-making.

Today, NIEA serves as a national advocate for Indigenous education across all school systems in the United States. Recognizing that approximately 90 percent of Native students attend public schools, the organization prioritizes the development and dissemination of culturally responsive instructional resources and materials that empower both Native and non-Native educators to teach Native histories, cultures, and contemporary issues accurately, respectfully, and responsibly.

Through ongoing partnerships, research initiatives, and professional learning opportunities, NIEA continues to lead the movement toward educational sovereignty and self-determination, ensuring that every Native learner is supported academically, culturally, and spiritually.

**For additional images and resources, visit NIEA's official Flickr account:**

**URL:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/128050680@N05>

### **National Indian Education Association, Grades 3-5 Student Centered Learning Activities**

- Giving Thanks: A Haudenosaunee Message of Thanksgiving
- Ice Hop Like Eskimos: The Scissor Broad Jump
- Make Your Own Bullroarer
- Ancient Astronomy: Native American Star Stories
- Create Your Own Book: The Different Tales of the Raven
- Trickster Tales Comics: The Cunning Coyote
- Chickasaw's Eula "Pearl" Carter Scott: The Youngest Pilot
- Navajo Weaving: A Lesson in Math and Tradition
- Make Pottery like Pueblo Artist Maria Montoya Martinez
- Our Elders: Storytelling & Oral Traditions
- The Long Dog's Winter Count
- A Life in Beads: The Stories a Plain Dress Can Tell
- I Remember: Poems & Picture of Heritage (Using Acrostic Poetry)
- Choctaw Code Talkers

- Native Traditional Dance Forms: The Round Dance
- Native Traditional Music: Drums and Shakers
- Learning from Apache Artist Allan Houser: Observing Life Around You
- Sequoyah's Talking Leaves: The Cherokee Alphabet
- Learning to Dance Like an Ojibwe Jingle Dancer
- Honoring Warrior Spirit: The 2020 National Native American Veteran's Memorial

### **NIEA, Grades 6-12 Student-Centered Learning Activities**

- Let's Play Chunkey
- Do you have what it takes to compete in the Native Youth Olympics
- Native Science: Making a Salt Stick
- Celebrate Joy Harjo: The First Native American Poet Laureate
- Understanding and Celebrating Two Spirit People
- First Nations Names for Famous Landmarks
- Food Traditions: Making Cherokee Bean Bread
- Play the Paiute Hand Game "Stick and Bones"
- The Cultural Significance of Naming
- Making Frybread: How Food can Shape Cultural Identity
- Olympic Winner Billy Mills Lives His Lakota Values
- Picaria: A Zuni Math Game
- Making Your Own Cultural Timeline
- Te Ata Fisher: The Award-Winning Chickasaw Storyteller
- What Exactly is Food Sovereignty?
- Ancient Astronomers: The Skidi Pawnee Star Chart
- Traditional Native American Games of Chance
- Sioux Chef Sean Sherman: A Rebirth of Native American Cuisine
- The Power in (Re) Telling History: A Look at Jim Thorpe's Life Part 1
- The Power in (Re) Telling History: A Look at Jim Thorpe's Life Part 2

### **NIEA, Grades K-5**

Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribe - [Coloring Worksheets](#)

[Woodland Indian Education Program Coloring Pages](#) for students in grades PK-4  
 Urban Indian Health Institute's coloring pages by Megan McDermott (Blackfeet/Plains Cree)  
<https://www.uhi.org/resources/urban-indian-coloring-pages/>

[San Diego Zoo Interactive Website](#) This site features animal videos, information, activities, and

online games through the San Diego Zoo. Most applicable to grades PK-4.

## **NIEA, Grades 6-12**

In collaboration with Native People Count California, NIEA developed a curriculum unit The Significance of the Census for American Indians in California. [Click here](#) to access this downloadable PDF or visit <https://nativepeoplecountca.org/resources-downloads/>

Montana Office of Public Instruction, Indian Education Division - Indian Education for All.

- [Blackfeet and Crow Star Stories](#) - This lesson is appropriate for grades 5-8.
- [Essential Understanding One Lesson](#) - This online ready lesson helps students learn more about Essential Understanding One: Tribal Diversity. This lesson is appropriate for grades 5-12.
- [Learning about the Seals of Montana Tribal Nations](#) - This online ready lesson helps students learn about the meaning of the seals for each of the Montana tribal nations. It is appropriate for grades 4-12.
- [Learning about Tribal Sovereignty](#) - This online lesson will provide students with important information regarding tribal sovereignty. This is for grades 9-12.
- [Resilience in Indian Country: Yesterday and Today](#) - This online lesson tells the story of a Crow woman named Pretty Shield and an American Indian youth of today. It is appropriate for grades 6-12.
- [Resources for Learning about Contemporary American Indian Issues](#) - Bison Restoration - This online ready lesson helps students learn about restoration of the bison to several Montana reservations and the importance of the bison to American Indians. It is appropriate for grades 6-12.
- [Junior Scholastic article](#) “The Code that Couldn’t be Broken” This digital magazine article features information for youth on the Navajo Code Talkers. It includes a video resource and lesson materials. Most applicable to grades 5-12.
- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) This learning lab features videos and supporting documents and activities to share examples of ledger art across several Native American tribes. Most applicable to grades 5-8.
- [TEDEd: Impact of Math in the World Around Us](#) This webpage features a collection of videos about the impact of math in the world around us and in history. Videos include how math is used in movie production, navigation, sports, etc. Most applicable to grades 6-12.
- Oregon Department of Education [10th Grade Tribal History Lesson Plans](#)

## **NIEA, Grades K-12**

[Classroom Lessons and Information from the United States Census Bureau](#)

[The Ultimate STEM Guide for Kids: 239 Cool Sites about STEM.](#) Applicable to all grade levels. This website features STEM websites/tools, STEM career resources, and STEM government initiatives broken down by grade level.

[First in Math Downloadable Worksheets for all grade levels.](#)

**Montana Office of Public Instruction**, Indian Education Division - Indian Education for All  
[Traditional Games Units](#)  
[Traditional Games Video](#) - See the games being played!

**U.S. Census Bureau:** [Check out their website](#) for a variety of resources, lesson plans, and activities.

[Parent/Caregiver Toolkits](#)

[“Everyone Counts!” Story and Activity Book](#)

[Home & Distance Learning Activities](#)

[Dr. Seuss Coloring Pages](#)

[VeggieTales: Everyone Counts!](#)

## **Honoring Tribal Legacies**

[Pre-K through Community College free online curriculum.](#) Applicable from Early Childhood to Post-Secondary.

[Primary Sources](#) for use in developing curriculum and educational materials to help honor tribal legacies in U.S. History.

Upstander Project: [Dawnland Teacher’s Guide and Learning Guide.](#)

[Native Tech](#) An internet resource for indigenous ethno-technology focusing on the arts of Eastern Woodland Indian Peoples, providing historical & contemporary background with instructional how-to’s and references.

## **Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian**

[Native Knowledge 360](#) Native Knowledge 360 features printable and interactive lesson plans for teachers. These can be used in smaller segments for online learning.

[Cultural Video](#) This video features a performance by world champion hoop dancer, Nakotah LaRance (Hopi Nation). His father Steve LaRance (Hopi/Ohkay Owingeh) sings and drums.

[Learning Lab](#) This learning lab features videos and supporting documents and activities to share examples of ledger art across several Native American tribes.

[PBS Learning Media](#) Teachers and parents can access learning videos, lessons, activities, and other resources across for all content areas and learning ages.

[Oneida Community Native American Education Resources for the Classroom](#) This website provides several resources, including text lists, lesson resources, video links, professional development, and other cultural resources for teachers. [Indian Pueblo Cultural Center Curriculum](#)

Teachers can download curriculum and professional development materials for Indigenous Wisdom: Centuries of Pueblo Impact in New Mexico.

[National Geographic: Learning at Home Activities](#)

Bring the world into your home with digital lessons in science and exploration. Lessons have videos, images, and pdf printables but they can also be viewed online. [Tulare County Office of Education](#)

Distance Learning Resources for educators and families.

**The University of Arizona**

[Toolkit for Parents and Teachers.](#)

[Vision Maker Media & PBS](#)

Vision Maker Media has partnered with PBS Learning Media to bring Native storytelling and content into your home. Pre-curated lesson plans and discussion guides free for online use.

[7 Generation Games](#)

Provides Native-themed educational online games- Free while schools are closed due to COVID-19. Applicable to all grade levels. [Fish Lake Game Standards](#) Culturally-relevant math problems for addressing and teaching fractions.

[Teaching Fractions in 10 minutes.](#)

**NIEA, more applicable to grades 3-5.**

[Key History Terms and Concepts.](#) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

**NIEA, more applicable to grades 4-7.**

Montana Office of Public Instruction [Birthright: Born to Poetry - A Collection of Montana Indian Poetry](#)

## **Implementation Plan**

My focus will be on three areas of the Culturally Responsive Schooling in Indigenous serving Schools - CRISS tool be. Relationality, relationship and community, Indigenous knowledge systems and language.

- Relationality, relationship, and community

1. Relationships within and among local/regional Indigenous community are understood and/or reflected
2. Relationships within the classrooms are strong

- Indigenous knowledge system

1. Traditional and / or cultural knowledge is included
2. Norms, values, traditional, interest of local/regional Indigenous community are leveraged for learning opportunities
3. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities

- Indigenous Language

1. Local Indigenous language is valued
2. Local Indigenous language is integrated

### ***Implementation of Culturally Responsive Practices in My Previous School***

At my previous school, we began our journey toward establishing a truly Culturally Responsive School by first examining our daily schedule to identify opportunities for consistent cultural engagement. Our goal was to ensure that students participated in at least one cultural activity every day, grounding learning in Apache values, traditions, and community identity.

#### ***Daily Cultural Activities***

To accommodate this goal, we extended the school day and began earlier starting at 7:30 a.m. Each morning opened with a daily cultural ceremony that brought the entire school together. Students gathered to sing four traditional Apache songs accompanied by drums, which were purchased specifically for student use in our morning opening and announcement ceremonies.

This daily tradition honored respect, unity, and cultural continuity. Students were encouraged to participate through singing or social dancing, always maintaining reverence for the drums and the sacred songs. Staff, community members, and visitors were also invited to join, creating an atmosphere of shared respect and belonging. After the four songs concluded, the day's announcements followed, allowing the cultural and administrative aspects of the day to flow seamlessly together.

### ***Cultural Environment and Representation***

The hallways of our school served as a visual reflection of our community's cultural richness. Artwork and artifacts from various Indigenous groups—including Apache artists—were displayed throughout the campus, ensuring that students saw their identities represented and celebrated every day.

### ***Family and Community Engagement***

Each month, we hosted Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings, intentionally incorporating a cultural activity or guest speaker. During the winter months, one meeting was dedicated entirely to traditional storytelling, honoring oral history and intergenerational teaching.

In the fall, the school actively participated in the Tribal Fair, coordinated a pageant, and celebrated Indigenous Peoples' Day, featuring performances by the Apache Crown Dancers, as well as an appearance by the Theodore Roosevelt School Queen and her court. Throughout the year, the Crown Dancers represented their schools at numerous events, fostering unity and pride among students across both public and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools on the reservation.

### ***Fort Apache Day and Cultural Gatherings***

In collaboration with Fort Apache Day, our school was granted the day prior to host a student-led cultural event. This led to the establishment of the First Annual Gathering of School-Age Crown Dancers, held on the historic grounds of Fort Apache. The event brought together over eight Crown Dancer groups from across the reservation to perform and celebrate their shared heritage. The success of this gathering has made it an annual tradition, strengthening interschool relationships and cultural pride among youth.

### ***Cultural Professional Development for Staff***

Recognizing that cultural responsiveness begins with staff understanding and participation, we embedded **cultural professional development (PD)** directly into our **schoolwide plan**.

- **First Quarter:** The academic year opened with a **blessing of the staff and school board** by a traditional medicine man and the Crown Dancers.
- **Second Quarter:** The school hosted a **Thanksgiving Feast** for students, parents, and community members, promoting gratitude, service, and togetherness.
- **Third Quarter:** Staff engaged in **reflection and evaluation**, reviewing academic, cultural, and traditional initiatives from the year. Feedback was used to inform the next **School Improvement Plan (SIP)**, ensuring that continuous cultural improvement was part of our academic cycle.

Newly hired staff also received training in Apache traditions and cultural protocols, helping them integrate respectfully and effectively into the community. Each quarter's professional

development session incorporated Apache culture—emphasizing ceremony, reflection, and shared learning.

***Institutionalizing Culturally Responsive Practices***

For cultural activities to be sustainable, they must be formally embedded in the schoolwide plan and supported through allocated funding. We ensured that culturally responsive initiatives were integrated into supplementary programs such as the 21st Century Learning Grant, After-School Programs, and Residential Life Program. This alignment created a schoolwide structure where culture, academics, and wellness were inseparable.

Collaboration was essential—parents, staff, administrators, the school board, and community members all shared a unified commitment to nurturing a culturally affirming environment.

***Impact and Outcomes***

The establishment of daily and ongoing culturally responsive practices produced tangible improvements in our school climate and student outcomes. We observed:

- A **significant decrease in disciplinary incidents**,
- Improved **student engagement and attitudes toward learning**,
- Stronger **relationships among staff**, and
- A profound **sense of belonging and family** among students.

By weaving Apache traditions into the rhythm of each day, the school transformed into a place where students not only pursued academic excellence but also felt seen, valued, and at home. Our efforts affirmed that when culture is honored, education becomes a pathway of identity, pride, and community empowerment.

**Assessment**

Schools can use this assessment to evaluate their school the three areas.

<b><i>ELEMENTS FROM THE CRAIS TOOL</i></b>	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
<b>1.RATIONALITY, RELATIONSHIP, AND COMMUNITY</b>							
Relationships withing and among local/regional Indigenous communities are understood and /or reflected,							
Local / reginal community is reflected							
<b>2.INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS</b>							
Traditional and/or cultural knowledge is included							
Norms, values, traditional interest of local/regional Indigenous communities are leveraged for learning opportunities,							
Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities.							
<b>3.INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE</b>							
Local Indigenous language is valued.							

Local Indigenous Language is integrated.							
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- 3 High degree of opposite
- 2 Medium degree of opposite
- 1 Low degree of opposite
- 0 Zero
- 1 Low
- 2 Medium
- 3 High

When you are evaluating your school take notes along with this score tool and make sure you put a date on it so your school can make comparisons throughout the school year. You may want to do this quarterly until you have improved your situation, then once a semester.

Take a look at the Crais Tool and see if there are other areas you would like to include.

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<sup>1</sup> By the "West" or "Western," we refer broadly to the system of education that evolved in Europe, was replicated and formalized in the United States, and is undergirded by principles of scientific inquiry and European and North American civilization, arts, and culture.

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