

FACT SHEET FOR SUPPORTING NATIVE AMERICAN & ALASKA NATIVE YOUTH IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

- Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska -



There are 227 federally recognized tribes in Alaska. There are nearly 31,000 students in Alaska who identify as Alaska Natives.

There are 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington. There are over 15,000 students in Washington public schools who identify as Native American.

There are 4 federally recognized tribes with reservation lands in Idaho. There are over 3,600 students in Idaho who identify as Native American.

There are 9 federally recognized tribes with reservation lands in Oregon. These tribes have over 3,200 students enrolled in Oregon public schools. There are nearly 10,000 students in Oregon public schools who identify as Native American.

Native nations are organized differently in Alaska than in other states. Instead of tribal-level reservations, most Indigenous and Inuit communities are organized into Alaska Native villages.

Not all Indigenous students live in traditional Western family units. For example, some tribes do not distinguish between siblings and cousins. It is best not to question familial relationships or expect students to talk about their family in Western terms.

Not all Native Americans are members of a federally recognized tribe. Some may be members of a non-Federally recognized tribe or are unable to obtain membership.

CULTURE

- ◆ Most Native languages and worldviews are centered around various levels of animism and place value on nature and sustainability. This can create conflict and dissonance in school subjects that promote (even innocently) the idea that animals, nature, and objects are worthless or inanimate.
- ◆ Most Native children identify with a collectivist culture that values the family and community over the individual self. This may influence higher education and career choices. If Native students do pursue higher education or job opportunities far from their community, this may lead to isolation and even failure to follow through on their goals without support, connections, and tools to lean back on.

COMMUNICATION

- ◆ Native students may avoid eye contact with educators. This is a sign of respect.
- ◆ Native students tend to be more reflective and may spend longer thinking before they answer. Educators can pause for longer after asking questions.
- ◆ For many students, it is considered disrespectful to speak in front of older relatives. This may manifest in the classroom as a reluctance to speak up.
- ◆ Sometimes it is customary for one person to speak for their family or siblings in public.

CLASSROOM TIPS

- ◆ Include lessons about Native culture and history. This has been shown to improve Native students' academic performance and outcomes. Teachers that have a historic awareness and understanding of events can better understand and connect to Native students.
- ◆ Plan and seek professionals to speak/present in order to fill voids of historical teachings in public school systems (rather than always looking to one individual student to speak).
- ◆ Indigenous students are more likely to prefer a visual learning style, such as observation or demonstration. This is how many children are traditionally taught by their elders.
- ◆ An Indigenous student may not know or feel qualified to speak about all Indigenous peoples and cultures. You might ask them to speak on their own experiences or knowledge within their own tribe; rather than for all Indigenous peoples. You wouldn't ask a Euro-American student to speak about the cultures of all European countries.
- ◆ Indigenous students might be uncomfortable or unwilling to discuss their language, culture, and religion. Pressing them for information, which is seen as private by the community, may be isolating and stressful for Indigenous students.
- ◆ Discuss contemporary issues Indigenous communities may be facing. This can help combat the idea that Native culture, as well as colonialism and its effects, are a thing of the past.
- ◆ Allow for reflective learning through personal responses from students. This is a comforting learning style for many Indigenous students but will benefit everyone in the classroom.
 - ◆ Take time to become familiar with the tribes who reside in your state. Gain background knowledge on the tribe/community where your student(s) are from.
 - ◆ Be tolerant and accommodating of absences due to cultural and religious practices the Indigenous student is taking part in.
 - ◆ Be attentive to any barriers Indigenous students may be facing both within school and outside of it, as you would with all students (examples: issues with identity, access to resources, culture shock, absences, etc.).
 - ◆ Pay attention to the language used when discussing Indigenous topics/history/culture. If unsure, ask students for their preferred vocabulary (examples: Native, Indian, Indigenous, name of tribe, etc.).