



Graduate Profile Development: Engaging Montana Tribes & American Indians

Fostering Strong Collaborations to Prepare Students for Success

Benefits of Creating a Graduate Profile:



Develop Shared Goals

Through the development of a Graduate Profile, schools and community members will have the opportunity to identify shared goals and aspirations for students.



Strengthen Cultural Congruence

The development of a Graduate Profile creates opportunity for community values to shape the intended outcomes of education and create congruence between schoolwork and community culture.



Increase Relevance

As schools anchor class activities and curriculum to the shared values of the Graduate Profile, students and community members will better understand the relevance and benefits of school activities.



Increase Student Participation

As students see their values and input represented in the Graduate Profile, they will feel an increased sense of ownership over their own school experience.



Strengthen Family and Community Engagement

Families and community members will value the opportunity to shape the school experience of students and feel like valued stakeholders.

What is a Graduate Profile?

A Graduate Profile is a learner centered model of education based on a shared vision of the skills and attributes students need to be successful over the course of their lives. In 2024, school districts will begin the process of collaborating with families, students, and community members to develop a Graduate Profile and incorporate feedback from diverse groups of people. The formation of a Graduate Profile provides schools will have a set of community-identified priority skills and attributes to anchor teaching and learning activities to. Graduate Profiles help schools and communities collaborate to best prepare students for success after graduation.

For next steps and more information, please visit the OPI's [2024 Accreditation Process website](#).

Foundational Knowledge to Engaging Montana's Tribes and American Indians:

- Montana is home to eight sovereign Tribal Nations and 12 distinct tribes. Each Montana tribe is unique and so too is each tribal community (on and off reservations) and each community member.
- Approximately 40% of Montana Indian students attend schools located off reservation lands; engaging Urban Indian students and community members is important.
- The culture and traditional knowledge of Montana's tribes continue to provide essential guidance and understanding in the lives of many Montana Indians, including those living in urban parts of the state.

Please see [Montana's Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians for more information](#).

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Recommended Engagement Strategies

Before engaging community members in conversations about the Graduate Profile, ensure a process is in place for collecting all feedback, incorporating feedback into decision-making, and maintaining transparency throughout the process. It is important to ensure adequate time is built in for all stakeholders to carefully consider and respond to requests for feedback. Also, ensure plans for follow-up are established at every engagement. It's vital that all who collaborate in Graduate Profile discussions receive follow-up information to know how their feedback was incorporated and which skills and attributes were ultimately selected to be a part of the local Graduate Profile.

American Indian Students:

- **Provide various ways to participate:** Provide multiple ways for students to provide input to Graduate Profile discussions and allow students to self-select how to participate. For example, provide anonymous surveys and the opportunity to participate in focus groups with peers and allow students to select their preferred method of participation.
- **Utilize trusted adults:** Whenever possible, utilize a trusted staff member to assist in gathering student input. School staff with a similar lived experience of American Indian students may be the best positioned to maintain feelings of safety during the information gathering process.
- **Gather feedback through a writing assignment:** Ask students to write about their hopes for the future and the skills they will need to be successful.

Family and Caregivers of American Indian Students:

- **Utilize trusted community members:** Whenever possible, utilize trusted members of the community to assist in engaging families and caregivers.
- **Create a welcoming environment:** Ensure the space where engagement takes place is one that lends itself towards equity and feelings of security. For example, hold meetings in the library versus an office and arrange chairs in a circle. School staff with a similar lived experience as the local residents can assist in these efforts. Use common, understandable language in communications with families and caregivers and avoid technical jargon, acronyms, and terms that are not commonly used outside of the school setting. If possible, serve a meal and incorporate local cultural protocols during engagement events.
- **Go to family and caregivers:** Utilize community events, such as sporting events, powwows and round dances, and Bingo halls, where families and caregivers are often in attendance and create opportunities for engagement in these spaces. Local health clinics, post offices, and grocery stores may be other places to engage members of the community. Many schools will also have existing parent groups, such as Title VI Parent Committees.

Tribal Leaders:

- **Utilize existing consultation opportunities:** Under state and federal law, consultation between schools and tribal councils is likely already occurring. Schools can use existing consultation times to engage tribal leaders in graduate profile discussions and collaboration. Please see the OPI's [Tribal Consultation Guide](#) for more information.

Elders/Knowledge Keepers:

Always be aware that Elders and Knowledge Keepers are highly revered members of any American Indian community, including in urban areas. Providing a culturally appropriate gift (e.g. tobacco) in exchange for the knowledge shared is recommended.

- **Utilize trusted community members familiar with local cultural practices:** Whenever possible, utilize trusted members of the community who are familiar with local cultural practices to assist in engaging Elders/Knowledge Keepers; always follow their guidance.
- **Let Elders/Knowledge Keepers set the pace:** In all interactions with Elders/Knowledge Keepers show respect and patience by allowing the Elder/Knowledge Keeper set the pace of the conversation and leave space for each to say all that they need to say.