



# 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit Evaluation Report

## Summit Overview

The 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit was held in East Helena, MT on April 9-11, 2025. The Summit brought together approximately 230 students and school staff from 16 different schools and seven Knowledge Keepers. A little more than half of the students in attendance (53%) attend schools on or near a Tribal Nation while 39% attend school in an urban area and around 8% attend school in a small, rural town. Of the 16 schools that attended, 13 are eligible for Title I services, 11 of which are receiving school-wide Title I support.

One of the three schools not receiving Title I services is an Alternative high school and the other two are located in an urban area.

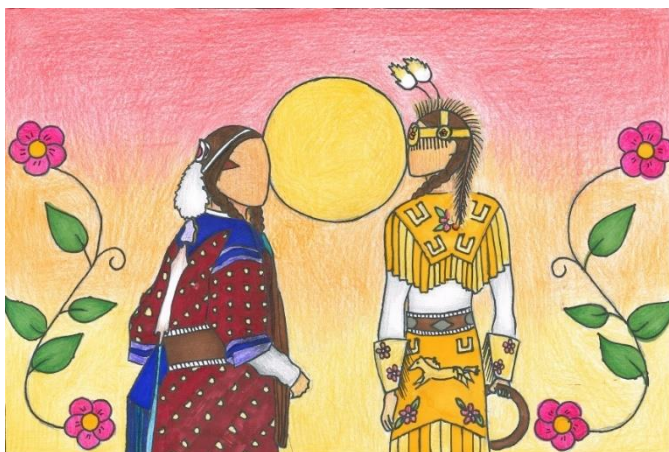
This year, students participating in the RISE Native Student Leadership group selected the Summit theme of “Wisdom from our ancestors: Hope and purpose for our future”. RISE students helped plan many portions of the conference during bi-weekly RISE meetings throughout the preceding fall and winter. Evaluations from the 2024 RISE Tribal Education Summit were also used to inform the activities and delivery of the 2025 Summit.

During the Summit, students and school staff participated in activities related to the Summit theme of *hope* and *purpose*. The goals of the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit are outlined below:

- Students gain a better understanding of their purpose in life and motivation to live out their purpose
- Students leave with a better understanding of how to live a healthy and meaningful life while ‘walking in two worlds’
- Students leave with a better understanding of what they would like to do after high school and the steps it takes to achieve their goal(s)

In addition to goals specific to the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit, there are several continuous goals connected to all RISE Tribal Education Summits with the intention of preparing students for educational and lifelong success. These goals include:

- Increasing student self-esteem



*2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit Art by Kamryn Sees The Ground*

- Increasing student feelings of self-efficacy to create positive change
- Fostering new, positive relationships with other students and school staff
- Providing opportunities to strengthen cultural connections

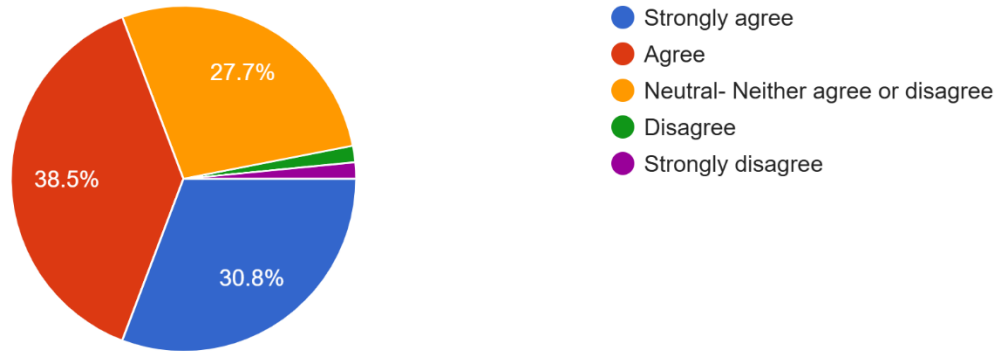
## 2025 RISE Summit Student Reflection Results

Responses from 65 students who attended the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit were gathered between April 11 and April 22, 2025.

### 2025 Summit Theme Questions and Responses:

I have an idea of what I want to do with my life after I graduate high school.

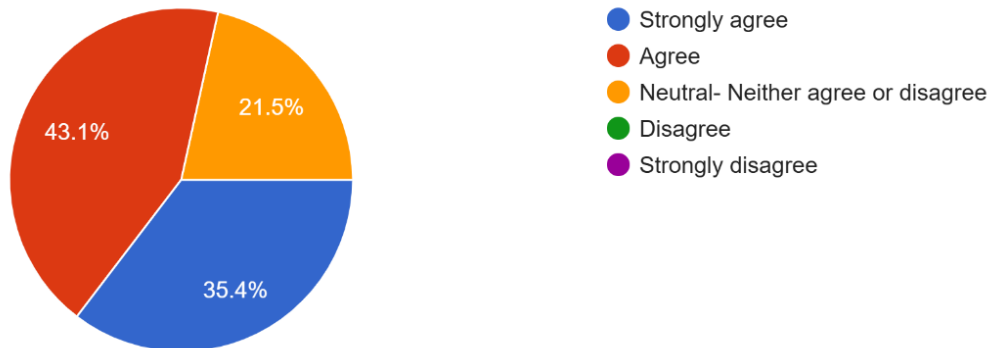
65 responses



*\*1.5% Disagree; 1.5% Strongly Disagree*

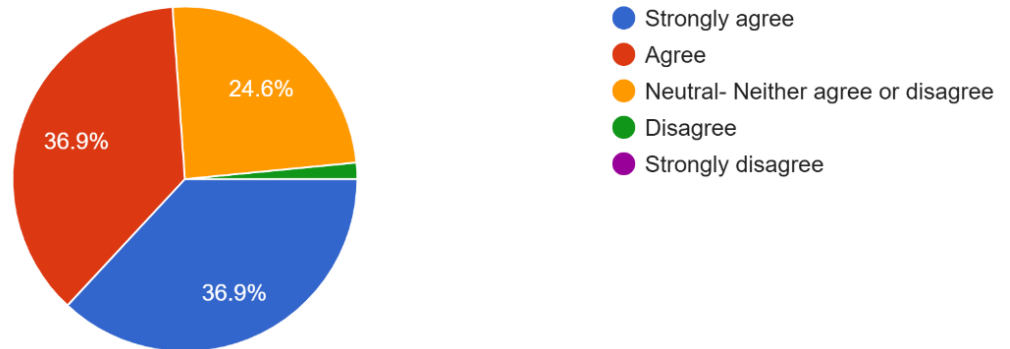
I have confidence I will be successful in life after high school.

65 responses



I feel hopeful and/or optimistic about my future after high school.

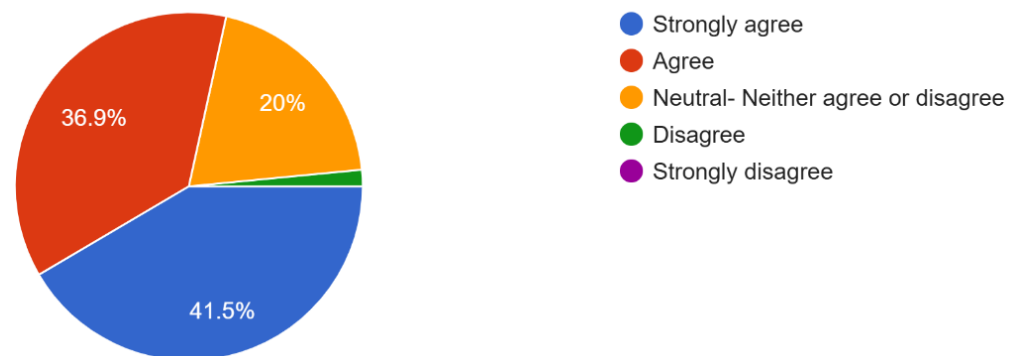
65 responses



*\*1.5% Disagree*

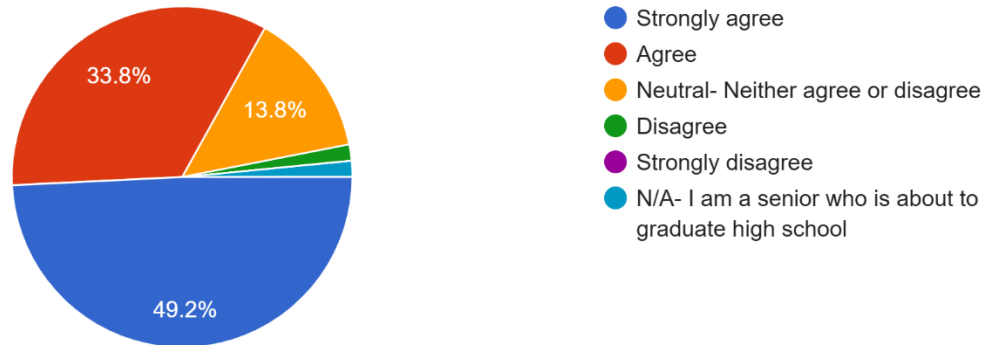
I feel motivated to fulfill my life's purpose.

65 responses



I feel motivated to graduate from high school.

65 responses



\*1.5% Disagree; 1.5% N/A I am a senior who is about to graduate high school

## Summary

Table 1. 2025 Summit Theme Responses Summary

Question	Total Positive Response*+	Neutral*	Total Negative Response*++
I have an idea of what I want to do with my life after I graduate high school.	69% (45)	28% (18)	3% (2)
I have confidence I will be successful in life after high school.	79% (51)	22% (14)	0% (0)
I feel hopeful and/or optimistic about my future after high school.	74% (48)	25% (16)	2% (1)
I feel motivated to fulfill my life's purpose.	78% (51)	20% (13)	2% (1)
I feel motivated to graduate from high school.**	83% (54)	14% (9)	2% (1)

\*Rounded to nearest whole number percentage and total number of students (N)

+Total combined percentage and number of students responding “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

++ Total combined percentage and number of students responding “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”

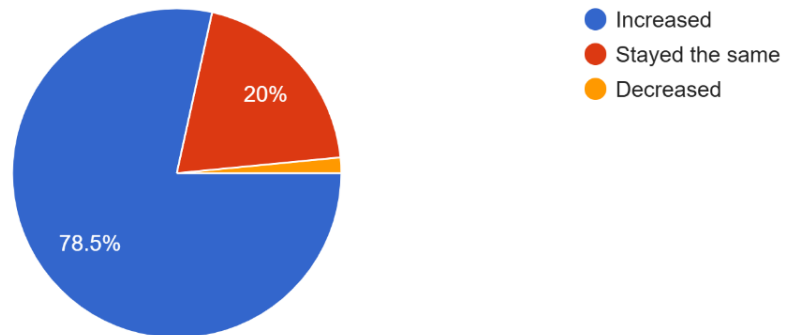
\*\*One student responded: N/A I am a senior who is about to graduate high school

Eighty-three percent of students who completed the post-Summit survey indicated they are motivated to graduate high school while 79% indicated they have confidence they will be successful in life after high school and 78% indicated they are motivated to fulfill their life’s purpose. Just under three-fourths of students who responded, 74% of students, indicated they feel hopeful or optimistic about their future and 69% indicated they have an idea or what they would like to do with their lives after graduating high school.

## Continuous RISE Summit Goals:

After attending the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit, my self-esteem (belief in myself) has:

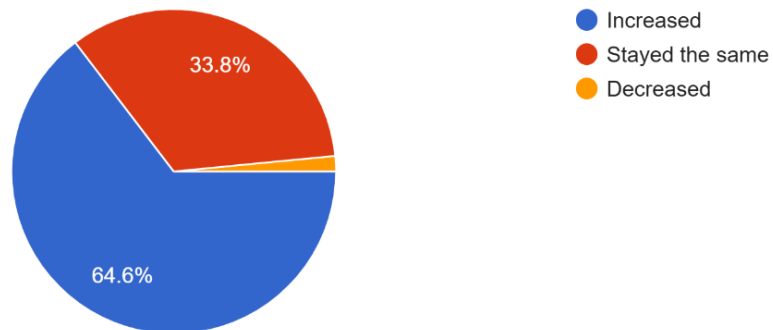
65 responses



*\*1.5% Decreased*

After attending the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit, my confidence to speak up about things that are important to me has:

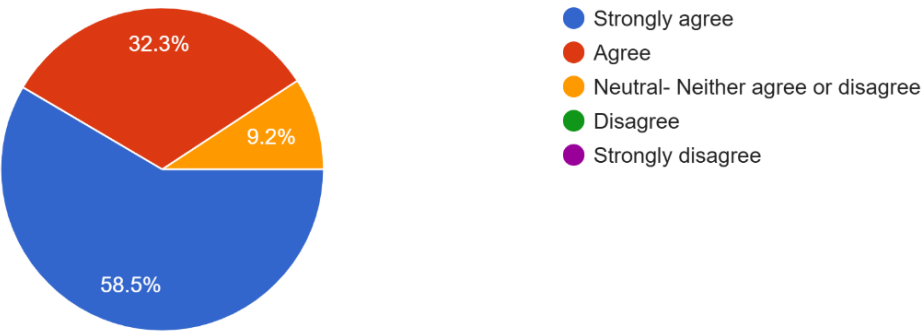
65 responses



*\*1.5% Decreased*

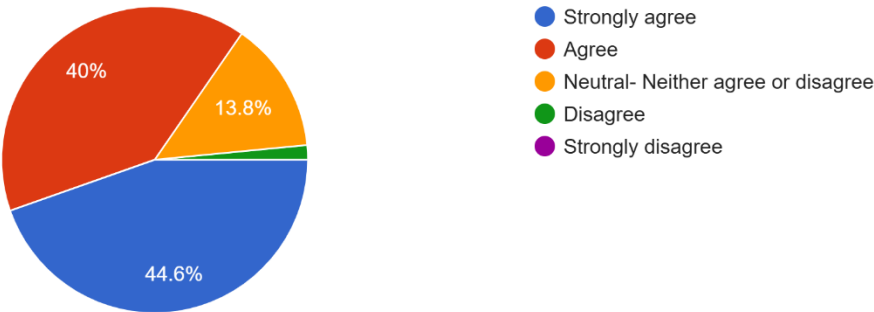
To what extent do you agree with this statement: During the RISE Summit students were given the opportunity to celebrate Indigenous culture and/or Native identity.

65 responses



To what extent do you agree with this statement: I formed new, positive relationships as a result of the RISE Summit.

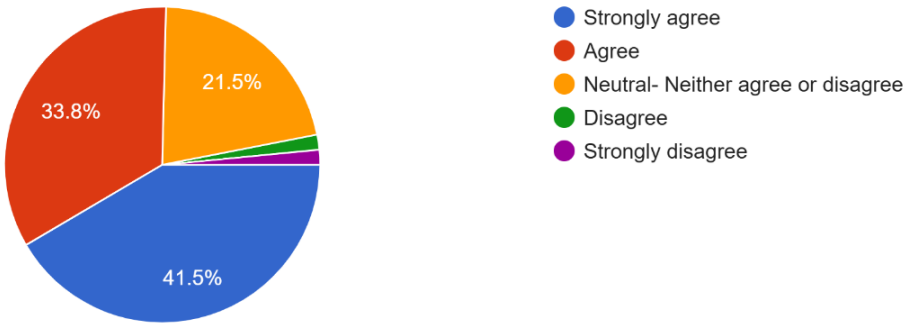
65 responses



*\*1.5% Disagree*

To what extent do you agree with this statement: I learned skills or information at the RISE Summit that I will use later in life.

65 responses



*\*1.5% Disagree;1.5% Strongly Disagree*

Summary

Table 2. Continuous Summit Goals Responses Summary

Question	Increased**	Stayed the Same*	Decreased***
After attending the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit, my self-esteem (belief in myself) has:	79% (51)	20% (13)	2% (1)
After attending the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit, my confidence to speak up about things that are important to me has:	65% (42)	34% (22)	2% (1)
Question	Total Positive Response**	Neutral*	Total Negative Response***
To what extent do you agree with this statement: During the RISE Summit students were given the opportunity to celebrate Indigenous culture and/or Native identity.	91% (59)	9% (6)	0% (0)
To what extent do you agree with this statement: I formed new, positive relationships as a result of the RISE Summit.	85% (55)	14% (9)	2% (1)
To what extent do you agree with this statement: I learned skills or information at the RISE Summit that I will use later in life.	75% (49)	22% (14)	3% (2)

\*Rounded to nearest whole number percentage and total number of students (N)

+Total combined percentage and number of students responding “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

++ Total combined percentage and number of students responding “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”

\*\*One student responded: N/A I am a senior who is about to graduate high school

Seventy-nine percent of students who completed the post-Summit survey reported their self-esteem increased after attending the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit and 65% of students reported a higher feeling of confidence to speak up about things that are important to them. Ninety-one percent of students who completed the post-Summit survey reported having an opportunity to celebrate Indigenous culture and/or Native identity while at the Summit. Eighty-five percent of students reported forming new, positive relationships as a result of the RISE Summit while 75% reported learning skills or information that they will use later in life.

## What Students Will Take from the Summit

Students were asked if they agreed that they learned new skills or information, to indicate what they would take home with them from the Summit. Below are the top themes from their responses to this open-ended question (note, many responses contained multiple themes and were included in multiple theme-counts):

Twenty-three students (28%) indicated they would take and utilize **cultural knowledge or practices**. Included in this figure are nine students (15%) who specifically mentioned the **Traditional Games** that were played during the Summit. Below are some examples of student’s written responses verbatim:

- *I will take home many of the lessons that the elders and individuals have spoken about and how they have grown and became much better and stronger than before.*
- *I will bring back the games and new culture we learned about back home*
- *i learned that spreading the love that you have for our culture and how we project that is still constantly around us although it is not the same as before colonization i think we’ve learned to embrace what we have today and embrace it i believe we show gratitude through that and having opportunities to have somewhat of a cultural exchange is so important in protecting us culturally. It is so relieving for some of us to just surround ourselves with people with the same skin color as us and not have to worry about the possibility of racism and just escaping that environment while getting out of our comfort zones and creating those bonds with people we probably wouldn’t have met otherwise*
- *i would take back the games*

Eight students (13%) described a variety of **behavioral changes or actions** they planned to make following the Summit. Below are some examples of student’s written responses verbatim:

- *To be more of a leader and set a better example for my peers and try to inspire kids to come to things like this.*
- *To learn and grow and Pay ation to my culture more*



- *I will do the tapping and saying the affirmations*
- *I will try to speak my language by asking family members who know it*
- *Knowing that there are people always there for me and to go to my elders when I need help.*

Seven students (12%) indicated they would take and utilize an **increased sense of self-esteem or self-confidence** from the Summit. Below are some examples of student's written responses verbatim:

- *My social and public speaking skills, and confidence in my ideas and my ability to develop those ideas.*
- *To have confidence and that young people are more capable of doing great things than I realized*
- *I will continue to put myself out there in new comfort zones among new people and take some of the traditional games as well as oral stories that were shared with me during my time here*
- *Confidence*

Another important thing to note is that among the students' responses, six students (10%) indicated they would **share what they learned at the Summit with others**. Below are some examples of those responses verbatim:

- *I'll use the traditional games to serve as a vessel to teach.*
- *The games and I'll tell my parents about the stories I've learned*
- *I'll tell my family and little siblings about the sweet grass and board game. To help my siblings*
- *I agreed because the information speakers have shared with me, I will continue to share with others, like people's experience with drugs and alcohol and how they have overcome it, people stories and advice about college and jobs, and lastly about new cultural experiences people practice that I think are extremely interesting.*

## Most Meaningful Part(s) of the Summit

Students were asked to describe the most meaningful part(s) of the RISE Summit. Below are the top 4 thematic responses (note, many responses contained multiple themes and were included in multiple theme-counts).

Thirty students (50%) indicated the **relationships formed** at the Summit were the most meaningful part to them. Below are some examples of those responses verbatim:

- *Getting more relationships and having a sense of community*
- *The round dance during the gala was surreal, because we were all having fun, smiles all around, engaging with all of my peers to share my hand and more memories*
- *Getting to listen to others' ideas and how they made them a reality. It was very inspiring and I made many new friends.*

- *Getting to see new faces from all around the state. And knowing we are all here for one reason and that is to keep our tradition alive and heal from our past.*

Nineteen students (32%) responded by providing examples of a variety of **cultural experiences** they were able to participate in during the Summit, including braiding sweet grass, playing traditional games, or participating in traditional dancing. Below are some examples of those responses verbatim:

- *The parts of the RISE summit that were the most meaningful to me was meeting new people from other cultures and experiencing new cultural activities I have not seen before.*
- *All the speakers and the knowledge that they hold and how they were ready to pass it on to young ones like myself really meant a lot also the indigenous games that we did were very important to me and fun.*
- *When we did the round dance.*
- *The braiding sweet grass.*

Fifteen students (25%) indicated **time with the Knowledge Keepers** was the most meaningful. Below are some examples of those responses verbatim:

- *Listening to the knowledge keepers*
- *When the elders talked to us about the story's*
- *Knowledge keepers wisdom*
- *Speaking with the elders*

## Additional Summit Highlights

This year the TSAR team worked hard to incorporate as many of the recommendations generated by students as possible, including braiding sweet grass and learning about smudging, playing Traditional Games, holding a Traditional foods demonstration and eating Traditional foods, having time to interact with Knowledge Keepers, and inviting a keynote speaker to talk about resilience after the boarding school era. The efforts to incorporate the ideas of students were fruitful as every student-recommended activity appeared in the post-Summit evaluations as an educational or meaningful activity for students who attended the 2025 RISE Summit. In fact, [all the activities offered](#) at the 2025 RISE Summit appeared in two or more student's response when asked what students will take home from the Summit and what was the most meaningful part of the Summit. For example, several students found the College and Career activities offered to be meaningful, with one student stating *I learned a lot about scholarships and how to finance my education*. Below are some additional highlights and moments of success from the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit which are difficult to capture in quantitative data sets:

- **Outside support:** This year the TSAR team applied for three grants and was awarded all three grants to help fund the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit. A previously awarded grant was also utilized. Sponsorships and donations from five other organizations were also received.

- Desire for continued participation: Several seniors who are graduating this year asked if they could continue to join RISE meetings when they begin college. This is a testament to the valuable connections built through the bi-monthly RISE meetings and in-person Summits.
- Student leadership roles: This year, 16 students from five schools served as student leaders. The role of a student leader was to serve as a positive role model, supportive peer, and help guide student groups through various activities during the Summit. After seeing the student leaders in action, two students, both who were participating in a RISE Summit for the first time, asked to serve as student leaders at the 2026 RISE Tribal Education Summit.
- Student voice: As mentioned above, the TSAR team worked diligently to incorporate student voice into the planning and implementation of the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit. One student commented saying, *It improved this year from the previous year you can just tell you listened to the suggestions*. The TSAR team had hoped the students would recognize their ideas being brought to life and will continue to incorporate student voice to the fullest extent possible.

## Recommendations from Students to Schools

On the last day of the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit students were asked to compile their recommendations as to how schools could assist students in finding *hope* and fulfilling their *purpose* in their everyday school experience. As school groups, students first engaged in small-group discussions with other schools. Students then wrote their responses on paper and a group of students presented their discussions and the written ideas to the entire audience present at the Summit. Below are the responses from students verbatim, organized by the same themes listed above and are repeated to show where multiple students wrote the same or similar idea.

### Student self-efficacy:

- Don't be afraid of being judged
- Give a safe space to students to share ideas
- More confidence
- More encouragement to students to lead from adults
- More field trips to encourage youth
- Motivational speakers
- Teaching self efficacy and locus of control
  - Locus of control: how much someone believes they control their own life
  - Self efficacy: belief in your own ability to act in ways to reach goals

### Positive relationships:

- More positivity
- More socializing
- Whole group mixes 4 more social engagement

#### Cultural experiences:

- Annual RISE Powwow (All schools work together)
- Beading
- Cooking and plant identification
- Cultural exchanges amongst tribes 1 on 1
- Cultural field trips
- Learn around traditional tea/medicines in culinary and science classes
- Learn your language from your people
- Make ribbon skirts
- More cultural activities
- More cultural activities
- More cultural activities that include hands on
- More round dances
- My school needs more learning about our cultural language
- Play traditional games in PE
- Potato/owl dance
- Practice language
- Push dance contest!
- Rock yo mocks
- Round dances
- Round dances
- Round dances
- To keep the traditional games because it teaches us about the history
- Traditional games

#### Knowledge Keepers:

- Elders speaking

#### Miscellaneous:

- Better food
- Better food selections
- Better lunches
- Better water
- Better water
- Clothe designing
- Contests
- More activities
- More field trips
- More outside activities

- No overprocessed
- Our Administrators hearing more and better consideration for our students

Of note is the multitude of ideas students generated for increasing access to cultural experiences in schools. Many of the activities students recommended have the potential to carry additional benefits for building positive relationships between students and their peers and the school and wider community. Additionally, many of the cultural experiences recommended could achieve several other student recommendations including more hands-on activities, time to speak with elders, and more socializing.

## Summit Conclusion: Working to Prepare Students for Educational and Lifelong Success

One of the greatest outcomes of the Summit, which is reflected in the responses of students is the growth in student's self-esteem and confidence to speak up about things that are important to them. Self-esteem positively predicts academic engagement (Zhao et al. 2021). As Zhao et al. (2021) state, *Students with high self-esteem have higher self-cognition and academic self-efficacy* (p.5); *students can better regulate all aspects of available resources and thus achieve their academic expectations and ultimately increase their engagement in learning* (Ouweneel et al., 2011; Zhang et al, 2021, p. 5). In Native adolescents specifically, a positive self-image has been correlated with an increase in academic achievement (Reyhner & Carjuzza, 2017; Whitbeck et al., 2001; Whitesell, Mitchell, & Spicer, 2009). In addition, positive self-image in Native adolescents has been linked to better emotional health (Cummins et al., 1999) and a decrease in risky behaviors such as substance use (Allen et al., 2006; Mackin et al., 2012), which impact a student's ability to attend and participate in school.

The number of students (50%) reporting gaining a new personal relationship is also worth noting. Positive peer and non-familial adult relationships have been found to reduce substance use (Whitesell et al., 2001) and risky behaviors (Mmari et al, 2010; Pu et al., 2013) while fostering better mental health (Barney, 2001; Borowsky et al., 1999; Pharris et al., 1997), and resilience (LaFromboise et al, 2006), all of which impact a student's ability to attend school and learn. Anecdotally, we know many of the friendships formed at the RISE Summit continue long after the Summit ends with students remaining in contact with each other and meeting in-person at other events.

Lastly, many students reported finding the opportunity to connect with Indigenous cultures and interact with Knowledge Keepers at the RISE Summit as a meaningful experience and gained information and/or skills they would use later in life. Cultural connectedness in Native adolescents has been shown to increase academic success (Whitbeck et al., 2001), foster resilience (LaFromboise et al., 2006), and protect against suicide (Pharris et al., 2013). Similarly, cultural congruence within academic systems has been shown to increase academic achievement in

Native students across multiple subject areas (Apthorp, D'Amato, & Richardson, 2002; Keith et al., 2017; Kisker et al., 2012; Stowe, 2017).

The Tribal Student Achievement and Relations unit is deeply grateful to the students, school staff, Knowledge Keepers, Traditional Games instructors, college and career representatives, and everyone else who made the Summit possible. If you are interested in learning more about the Tribal Student Achievement and Relations unit and the work we do, we invite you to go to [www.opi.mt.gov/weareone](http://www.opi.mt.gov/weareone).

*Thank you to everyone that made it possible for us students to be here. This was an awesome last RISE and I'm forever grateful for the opportunities and memories I've made these past 3 years. – 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit student participant.*



*Participants at the 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit*

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