

# Indian Education for All Planning Guide for Increasing Native American Student and Parent Involvement

## Planning guide for districts with a significant number of American Indian students

Several medium to large Montana school districts have a significant number of Native American students from various tribes. While increasing participation among American Indian students and their families can be daunting, using a clear, specific process can make the procedure much more effective and efficient. Family engagement in schools contributes to positive student outcomes, including improved student achievement, decreased disciplinary issues, improved parent-teacher and teacher-student relationships, and more positive school environment. This guide is intended to aid schools with developing an implementation plan. Plan development can be all-consuming limiting its scope and focus on concrete ideas and strategies to increase American Indian participation in school. This guide contains suggested tools and resources to answer four critical questions that are the foundation of a good plan.



1. What is the school attempting to do?
2. How is the school planning to make this happen?
3. At any given moment, how will the school know whether they are on track?
4. If the school is not on track, what will school staff do to correct it?

This guide contains ideas and examples intended to help you to complete your plan. The table below presents ideas that will help with increasing Native American participation in various school activities.

### Communication/Contacts

- A great starting point is to begin with a survey. This can be done electronically.
- It may be beneficial to offer a reward for returned responses. This may be a small gift card for all returned responses, or a little larger gift for one-three people in a raffle.

- Consistency is important. Keep doing it, keep sending out reminders. This may be through a phone call, email, letter sent through the mail, or all the above.
- One of many resources available is Donnie Wetzel Jr. in the Tribal Relations and Resiliency Unit at OPI. His email is [dwetzel2@mt.gov](mailto:dwetzel2@mt.gov) and phone number is 406-444-4527.
- Regular POSITIVE parent updates should be done periodically through phone calls, letters sent home in the mail, and email.
- [The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project](#) has a great training that can help schools develop strategies for meaningful and impactful home visits. Sometimes, events should be held at the school or another neutral site to get parents more comfortable before having schools' staff in their house.

### **Student/Family Engagement**

- Family dinners are a good way to engage Native families. Here are some general tips that can help make them successful. Don't be discouraged if initial attendance is small. Keep offering events and attendance will likely increase.
- Include food when holding awards or celebration events.
- Include door prizes or small gifts for attendees.
- Convene a meeting with the Native students and have them design an approach or initiative to get their parents more involved.
- Reach out to neighboring schools with a large population of Native American students and/or schools on the reservation, to request contact information and to assist in building relationships with elders/drum groups/singers.

### **Curricular and Instructional Supports**

- Have Indian education specialists in every school. (Some schools may already have them in place.)
- Contact [Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Staff](#) to assist the school with any additional ideas or suggestions for contacts in your area.

### **Initiatives, Positive Environments/Health and Wellness**

- Parent nights at schools: not conferences, but games, tours, and displays of student work.
- Oral Story interviews (parents and students).
- Student work regularly featured throughout the school's hallway walls, in classrooms, or newsletters and/or featured on the school website.
- Native representation in schools with [Making Montana Proud Poster](#) series and tribal flags/seals. Great Falls Public School has created their own version, titled [Strengthening Our Community](#).
- Create a positive Native youth leadership group.
- Consider starting a Native American youth drum group. Educators may need help making initial contacts with area tribal drummers and singers that might be willing to assist.