Shared Strategies to Support American Indian Students Through ESSER III Funding

This document and the link list are strategies intended to assist schools in the development of their *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)* plans (due **August 24**[th] in TEAMS) and applications (due **September 1**[st] in E-grants) Through a series of conversations with staff from the Office of Public Instruction, Tribal Leaders and community members, school staff, and youth, we collaborated to identify effective strategies schools may consider implementing to support youth now, and strengthen school and community supports for years to come.

This work, *Recommended Strategies to Support American Indian Students*, is designed to serve as a living document to continue to capture community-level input on strategies and resources. We hope and invite you to share, use, and add to this document. These strategies have braided the placed-based traditional strategies of success while being informed by federal guidance on the use of ESSER III funds and supporting evidence for their rationale can be found at the end of the document.

As we have sifted through the documentation around previous ESSER funds and now ARP-ESSER, we wanted to gather skilled and knowledgeable stakeholders to share the good things happening in their schools and communities and share it across the state as it pertains to ENRICHMENT. Academic enrichment provides an opportunity for inclusion and educational evolution as schools adapt and braid philosophies, methodologies and practices that can work for our American Indian students to help center and balance the educational life journey they are on.

The COVID pandemic has shown that school offers more than instruction; school offers relationships, security, safety, friendships, activities, nutrition, and memories of growth and success. We also understand that the mind cannot learn if it is stuck in trauma. We have seen the results of a care-first approach as the positive grades follow. Enrichment provides the opportunity of whole-child education and can expand and create a new school environment centered in relationships and self-identity correlated with academic success.

Factors Associated with American Indians Strength, Pride, Health, and Wellness

In a review of the academic, peer-reviewed literature, and emerging research several factors correlated to the academic success and wellness of K-12 American Indian students emerge:

- **Cultural engagement:** Opportunities for involvement in traditional activities, identification with culture, and traditional spirituality[1,7,9]
- **Goals and aspirations:** Possessing goals and feelings of self-efficacy[1,7]
- **Positive activities:** Opportunities to participate in positive activities such as sports teams and clubs[1,9]
- **Positive role models:** Positive American Indian role models[3]
- **Positive self-identity:** Possessing a positive self-image[1,5,9]

- **Supportive relationships:** Supportive family relationships (using local definitions of family and kinship)[1,5,7,9] and supportive non-familial relationships[5,9]
- **Welcoming Spaces:** School spaces with prominent displays of indigenous culture[2,6,8]

As you develop your *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)* plans, we encourage you to use this guidance document, add to it if you know of good things to share, and contact us if we can help in any way to assist your schools in identifying the most effective strategies you may consider implementing.

Strategy Categories

Strategy Category and Brief Description	
	Connect Students to Culture, Tradition, and Indigenous Knowledge Cultural connectedness includes any aspect of a student's life that is uniquely influenced by his or her connection and engagement with culture, tradition, and indigenous ways of knowing. Schools can support American Indian students by honoring the importance of cultural connectedness and recognizing connectedness to culture may look different for each student; schools can create opportunities for students to make connections in ways that are meaningful to each individual student. Many Montana schools are currently working across a spectrum to begin immersing students back into their traditional culture and ways of knowing. Wherever schools currently lie on the spectrum of immersion, steps can be taken to further each school on their paths towards full immersion and an evolution of indigenous education.
	Create Opportunities to Strengthen Positive Self-identity American Indian youth should *always* feel proud of their heritage and identity as American Indians. A positive self-identity promotes better wellness and higher academic achievement. [1,5,9] Schools can support the development of strong student self-identity by creating opportunities for developing and displaying student skills, such as creativity and leadership, and positively reflecting the community history and values.
	Foster School and Community Connections Relational strengths have contributed to the flourishing of Montana tribes for thousands of years and continue to be a source of strength today. By fostering connections between the school and community, schools can leverage the strengths of relationships[5,9] to support students in, and outside of, the classroom.
	Strengthen Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Social and emotional learning (SEL) takes place throughout every school and classroom. Many teachers are already incorporating SEL into their education delivery and student interactions to support student wellness and build foundations for future success. To *maximize* the potential benefits of SEL schools can adopt evidence-based and promising SEL practices and competencies that reflect the values of the local community.
	Support Student Mental Health and Wellness Addressing mental health concerns across a spectrum of care is essential to supporting student wellness. Regardless of location and resources, schools can take steps to support student behavioral health by strengthening in-school support and leveraging the systems of support within the community.

Strategy Quick Guide

The table below offers a snapshot of the strategies and how they relate to the categories presented above. Each strategy is outlined in more detail in the following pages.

Strategy	Page #	◌	🌱	⚛	👥	🧠
Create spaces that positively display indigeneity and reflect the student population	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Incorporate indigenous language into everyday school and out-of-school activities	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Incorporate traditional stories and indigenous ways of knowing into the learning process	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Incorporate welcoming routines that promote positive self and community identity	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Invite Elders and holders of indigenous knowledge to aid in the learning process	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leverage the tradition of athletics to promote positive self and community identity	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sponsor community-wide events that promote positive self and community identity	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strengthen and expand wraparound services for youth and families	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Work with community leaders to develop mentorship programs	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Actively involve students in the creation and delivery of teaching materials	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ensure youth and families know how to access community resources and mental health services	10	✓	✓	✓		✓
Support student and staff mental health by strengthening in- and out-of-school support services	11		✓	✓		✓

Strategies to Support American Indian Student Enrichment, Mental Health, and Social and Emotional Learning

The strategies below are recommended activities to support American Indian student enrichment, mental health, and social and emotional learning (SEL). For each strategy listed please find a short description, example(s) of the strategy in practice, and resources to support the implementation of the strategy in your classroom, school, and community.

Create spaces that positively display indigeneity and reflect the student population					

As Cajete (2004) states, a person's spirit is *actively situated in the environment*. By working with local artist (including youth artist) and local tribal cultural departments, schools can create spaces that prominently display the culture of the American Indian students attending the school. Visual representation of indignity can foster connection to culture and a positive self-identity which will positively impact the health and wellness of students. By working with local members of the community and honoring the beauty and strength of local culture and tradition, schools can strengthen the relationships between the school and community.
ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports

Example of this strategy in action:
- In Heart Butte, school administrators prioritized creating a learning space that was reflective of the Blackfeet students that attend the school.

Resources to put this strategy into practice:
- To learn more about the cultural resources in your community, use the OPI Montana Tribal Resource guide and search by category under "culture"

Incorporate indigenous language into everyday school and out-of-school activities					

Indigenous world view and ways of knowing are best conveyed through indigenous languages. Engaging pedagogy and sense-making, rooted in indigenous world view delivered through traditional language promotes cultural connections, opportunities to strengthen a positive self-identity, and social and emotional learning. Cultural engagement within the school through incorporating indigenous languages can promote relationship building between the school and community and promotes better mental health and wellness for student and staff.
ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal engagement

Examples of this strategy in action:
1. Schools can create signage in the traditional language(s) of the community.
- Many Montana schools, including schools in Hays Lodge Pole, Crow Agency, Browning, and Lame Deer have created signage within the school.
- Big Sky High School is supporting a student-lead project to incorporate the Salish language in to the school through signage. Through this work, students from Big Sky High School are working with holders of traditional knowledge within the Missoula and Salish tribal communities to develop the language and signs that will be displayed at the school.
2. Schools can develop a language kit for students and staff.
- Browning schools has created kits for students and staff.
3. Schools and out-of-school programs can incorporate language.

- The Lodge Grass boys' basketball team sought community input to identify powerful words in the Apsáalooke (Crow) language to use to call basketball plays. This provided opportunity to bridge basketball with traditional Apsáalooke culture, created connections between school staff and the community, and created a space to honor the community's heritage.

Resources to put this strategy into practice:
- To learn more about the cultural resources in your community, use the OPI Montana Tribal Resource guide and search by category under "culture".
- **Piegan Institute** provides resources and training to develop fluent speakers and teachers of Native languages, as well as technical training and on-site workshops at the Cuts Wood Blackfoot Language School in Browning, Montana. www.pieganinstitute.org
- Teacher/Student Language Kit Development and Training. Contact Darren Kipp & Jessie DesRosier (dk.pieganinstitute@gmail.com jessedesrosier@gmail.com); Sean Chandler (White Clay Immersion School); Echo Brown and Chaney Bell (Nk̓ʷusm Salish Language School)

Incorporate traditional stories and indigenous ways of knowing into the learning process					

Traditional knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing have contributed to the success and identity of American Indians since time immemorial and can be leveraged within schools and classrooms today, to accomplish the same intent. Incorporating traditional stories and indigenous ways of knowing into the learning process will provide opportunities for students to connect with their culture and positive self-identity development; engaging pedagogy and sense-making rooted in indigenous world view promotes social and emotional learning. Cultural engagement within the school can promote relationship building between the school and community and promotes better mental health and wellness for student and staff.

ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal engagement

Example of this strategy in action:
1. Schools can interview elders and create media for school and community learning to maintain oral traditions
- The Fort Peck Community College Chante Project worked with Rezkast Media to interview local elders and community thought leaders on their own life paths (college + career) as well as on tribal values, culture, and historical sites. You can find samples of this work on Chante's YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/c/ChanteProjectFPCC/videos.
- Hays-Lodgepole High School cultural inclusion efforts bring strength and healing to students: Centering Native Culture for Strength, Healing, and Student Success
- A recently completed School Climate grant provided direct experience and practice around the incorporation of traditional and placed based knowledge into our schools while also respecting the uniqueness of our Tribal Nations

Resources to put this strategy into practice:
- The OPI's Indian Education for All provides schools and staff with knowledge, skills, and content to ensure cultural enrichment, academic engagement, and equitable pedagogy for students. The Indian Education Featured Resources page and Classroom Resources page contains tools, guides, and resources for schools.
- To learn more about the cultural resources in your community, use the OPI Montana Tribal Resource guide and search by category under "culture"".

Incorporate welcoming routines that promote positive self and community identity					

Welcoming each student as he or she enters the school building is a simple yet very impactful strategy. Welcoming routines are a common social and emotional learning (SEL) strategy and several research studies have shown that greeting each individual student every school day can increase student behavioral health as well as academic achievement. Schools can further maximize the potential benefits of welcoming routines by incorporating the local community's culture and traditional greetings which will foster connection to culture, a positive self-identity, and reflect the strengths and positive identity of the community.

ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal engagement

Examples of this strategy in action:

1. Develop a welcoming routine for students, staff, and community members to welcome them to the school
   - In Heart Butte, students are offered the opportunity to smudge as they enter the school building. This strategy leverages the power of traditional culture and social emotional learning to create a learning environment that is welcoming to both students and community members.

Resources to put this strategy into practice:
   - Veronica Decrane - National Native Trauma Center, MTSS and Indigenous MBI specialist can provide various training to support these efforts as she respects the uniqueness of the Tribal Practices of each individual school.
   - Three Signature SEL Practices for the Classroom: This one-pager describes the value of welcoming routines and examples of how they can be used in classrooms and the entire school.
   - Smudging Protocols and Guidelines for Schools: This guide, developed in Canada, provides information on smudging and outlines how schools can implement smudging protocols to support students.

Invite Elders and holders of indigenous knowledge to aid in the learning process					

Traditional knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing have contributed to the success and identity of American Indians since time immemorial and can be leveraged within schools and classrooms today, to accomplish the same intent. By inviting Elders and knowledgeable community members into the school to contribute to the learning process, indigenous ways of knowing and traditional learning can occur and provide opportunities for students to connect with their culture. Seeing members of their community in the school sharing knowledge will help promote a positive self-identity and sense-making rooted in indigenous world view promotes social and emotional learning. Engagement with community members can promote relationship building between the school and community while cultural engagement promotes better mental health and wellness for students and staff.

ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal/community engagement

Examples of this strategy in action:
   - The Fort Peck Community College Chante Project created a Leaders/Speakers Directory that they shared out with school administrators and teachers. To build this directory Chante invited local elders and thought-leaders to lunches in each community across the reservation.

The lunches included activities demonstrating the power of storytelling. At the end of the lunch Chante asked the attendees if they would be willing to share some of their own stories to students across the Fort Peck Reservation. Almost every attendee agreed to be added to the speakers bureau list. The information on the list includes: Name, Contact Information, Location, and Speaker Story Topics.

- Heart Butte Schools has provided opportunities for Cultural Knowers and Elders to speak to students, offer support to students, and provide lessons to students from the stories and pride of their Tribe. Beginning of year celebrations and healings have been consistent to create a sense of connection and inclusion to the students interested in their ancestry and heritage.

Resources to put this strategy into practice:
- To learn more about the cultural resources in your community, use the OPI Montana Tribal Resource guide and search by category under "culture".

Leverage the tradition of athletics to promote positive self and community identity	

Physical prowess has always been present in American Indian communities. Now often expressed through athletic achievement, American Indian youth and communities continue to take pride in participating in, and supporting, athletic sports and games. Traditional games combine athletics with cultural teachings that build social emotional learning, a positive self-identity, and improve mental health. Over time, contemporary sports, primarily basketball, have come to serve in a similar role and have become as a source of positive self- and community-identity.
ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal/community engagement

Examples of this strategy in action:
1. Host community events to promote positive identity and collective pride
- The Native American Student Services Department of Missoula Public Schools sponsored a community-wide event to commemorate the end of the school year and featured both traditional games (double ball) and contemporary sports (basketball) to recognize the on-going tradition of health and athleticism of American Indians.
- Host a family and cultural gathering centered on holistic aspects or basketball as it connects to the pride and strength of the community. Invite past basketball players and coaches to address the discipline of success, staying on track in life and encourage healthy living. Create an honor wall to lift success and accomplishments of many student athletes.
- Hays-Lodgepole created an event with families and students to offer an opportunity to sit with Cultural Teachers and receive their tribal names.
2. Create awareness through athletics.
- Recently, the Salish and Kootenai Tribes put on a 3 on 3 tournament to educate on MMIP: Basketball tournament on Flathead Reservation raises money for MMIP
3. Build student skills set and connection to community
- Create documentary teams to capture events and share out across the nation. Train students to interview and edit. Develop youth sportscaster teams for local events and productions.

Resources to put this strategy into practice:
- The International Traditional Games Society provides resources, training, and workshops on traditional games

Sponsor and support community events that promote positive self and community identity					

Community events bring people together and strengthen relationships. Schools can sponsor community events and/or partner with organizations to hold community events that reflect the strengths of the community and promote relationship development and promote mental health. These events could include elements of tribal culture which can promote cultural connectedness, positive self-identity, and social and emotional learning. Summer and out-of-school enrichment activities can also be sponsored or supported by a school; many tribal communities offer youth programming which can be strengthened and expanded through school support.
ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal/community engagement

Example of this strategy in action:
- Through mini grants being administered by the OPI Tribal Wrap around Project local youth advisory teams are able to hold summer camps for youth in their area to continue their cultural education in hands-on settings. For example through the Rocky Boy Health Center LiFT will be hosting a 3 part Summer camp to address historical trauma and healing through cultural practices. This event will create long lasting relationships in the community and allow a space to continue education on cultural practices.

Strengthen and expand wraparound services for youth and families					

Wraparound services support students and their families to fulfill their academic and non-academic needs. Wraparound coordinators are trusted members of the community who are familiar with formal and informal systems of support at the local level, including cultural healing and support services. Wraparound coordinators actively work to connect students and their families with resources and support services to promote mental health and wellness. Strengthening wraparound services has been identified as a top recommended strategy for strengthening SEL and promoting mental health.
ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal/community engagement, wraparound

Example of this strategy in action:
1. The OPI's System of Care Tribal Wraparound Project is currently operating wraparound services in nine schools. The coordinators working with this project are knowledgeable in local support systems and resources which enables them to connect youth and families directly to services in a sustainable way:
- Wraparound project created intergenerational spaces for cultural-knowers, elders and youth to gather in and share culturally relevant social teachings.
- The Wraparound Project provided training to youth about restorative practices and trauma-informed care that strengthens the youths' social and emotional intelligence.
- Wraparound Facilitators teach and model a strengths-based model of engagement with youth, school staff, teachers and other community stakeholders to increase youth's self-efficacy and motivation to achieve objectives.
- Project staff supports schools to create a referral team and processes to refer students to wraparound and other supportive services. The project staff works closely with the referral team on an ongoing basis.

• Wraparound project provides training for all school staff about the MiiWrap mindset, principles, and process. • Project staff aligns with community stakeholders to provide training for community members around youth wellness and mental health issues that improves the quality of life for students. • Wraparound facilitators practice evidence-based relational and behavior change skills to improve identified youths' ability to manage mental and emotional wellness. • Wraparound facilitators work with students and their families to create a team of supports that work incrementally alongside the youth to achieve the goals they have identified for themselves. • In Heart Butte, school administrators absorbed the Wraparound Project staff and created a position to sustain the project's work in that community.	
Resources to put this strategy into practice: • To learn more about the OPI's System of Care Tribal Wraparound Project contact Stephanie Iron Shooter	

Work with community leaders to develop mentorship programs	
Establishing and expanding mentorship programs has been identified as a top recommended strategy for strengthening SEL and fostering strong community relationships. By connecting youth with positive role models from within their community, schools can strengthen student mental health, provide opportunities for positive self-identity development, and strengthen social support networks within and outside of the school. These programs can also be used as a way to create opportunities for cultural connections and expand opportunities for learning outside of the school setting. **ESSER Categories: enrichment, mental health supports, SEL learning supports, tribal/community engagement**	
Examples of this strategy in action: • Local and state youth advisory teams across Montana work to bring youth voice to the table in educational meetings and foster leadership skills. Through the network of youth and their advisors across the state, youth have opportunities to communicate their educational needs to the people serving them so that they can reach their highest potential in and out of the classroom. • Tribal Leadership and Tribal department shadowing and apprenticeship programs provide students the opportunity to shadow Councilmembers, engage in tribal government, and identify relevant careers in their communities. • Apprenticeship programs connecting to shop, woodworking, beading, drum making and other school courses can provide opportunities for skill development and career engagement. Industrial arts crews can provide community updates and construction.	
Resources to put this strategy into practice: • Montana Career Lab • Tribal Relations and Resiliency and Indian Student Achievement units • Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council	

Actively involve students in the creation and delivery of teaching materials and enrichment	

Each school day, students bring their unique lived experiences and skillsets with them to class. Schools can tap into and leverage these strengths by actively involving them in the creation and delivery of teaching materials. Such activities will strengthen student self-identity and create opportunities to develop social and emotional skills. Schools can further strengthen the potential benefits by providing opportunity for students to incorporate their culture and world view into the materials they develop and providing the opportunity to share materials with the community and/or other students in other schools.

ESSER Categories: enrichment, SEL learning supports

Examples of this strategy in action:

1. Converse with students on their interests and supporting their drive to develop opportunities they are vested in to build life-skills, self-identity, and create cultural support opportunities.

- Music studio development: Hays Lodgepole worked with Montana State University Billings in establishing a music studio within the school. Equipment and training were provided to create an opportunity for students to record their music, drum groups and to make beats to sing and rap to.
- Recently in the Youth RISE group, music was again an interest. Shadow Devereaux developed a mentorship program in conjunction with his studio for local access and enrichment. He has also developed an opportunity to meet with youth across the state and set time to work online through beat development, lyrical and song writing.
- Unreserved is a state-wide student empowerment and identity project where each student gets to use photos or hand-drawn images to tell his or her story, including his or her history (incorporating aspects of traditional storytelling) and future aspirations. The four thematic areas of the program, *Heritage, Happiness, Hurdle and Hope* are designed to build empathy, understanding, and provide opportunity for creative expression.

Resources to put this strategy into practice:

- Reach out to Shadow Devereaux for information on music studio development and student engagement.
- Reach out to Dani Phillips for more information on the student-led, art empowerment project, Unreserved.

Ensure youth and families know how to access to community resources and mental health services					
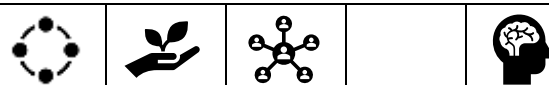
Montana tribes have always understood the importance of meeting personal and community needs as a requisite for achieving self- and community-actualization (Blackfoot indigenous ways of knowing informed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs). Schools can support students and families (including school staff) by working to ensure they are aware of the community resources available to them and how to access those resources, especially services that support mental health. Schools can create partnerships with community service providers, including cultural resources (i.e. traditional healing) and providers, to support the mental health needs and other needs of students and families. Through partnership development, schools can increase accessibility by bringing resources to the school or finding other ways to directly connect students and families to resources such as the Connect Referral System. Partnerships between schools and community resources (e.g. mental health service providers, housing support, food pantries) can create a supportive network that strengthens the relationships between schools and families and offers wholistic student support. School's may consider developing school-based health centers that provide mental health services within the school setting.

ESSER Category: mental health supports, tribal/community engagement, wraparound
Example of this strategy in action: • The [Fort Peck Health Promotion Disease Prevention](#) program provides an array of school-based health services including mental health, dental, and primary care services, at five locations. This program also offers culturally based behavioral health services including equine therapy rooted in traditional practices.
Resources to put this strategy into practice: • To learn more about the resources in your community, use the [OPI Montana Tribal Resource guide](#) and search by location or by specific resource type • To learn more about the cultural resources in your community, use the [OPI Montana Tribal Resource guide](#) and search by category under "mental health"

Support student and staff mental health by strengthening in- and out-of-school support services					

Montana students have expressed concerns about the increasing mental health needs of students and recommend schools find ways to provide consistent mental health services within the school setting that are readily available and easy to access. Expanding mental health services is an area of focus within the federal ESSER guidance which encourages schools to identify ways to support student and school staff mental health by hiring mental health professionals and/or providing training to existing school staff. Schools can create partnerships with mental health service providers, including cultural resources (i.e. traditional healing) and providers, to support the mental health needs of students and school staff. Through partnership development and/or training opportunities, schools can increase awareness of mental health recourse and increase accessibility by bringing resources to the school. School's may consider developing school-based health centers that provide mental health services within the school setting and create community-wide training opportunities for school staff and community members.

ESSER Category: mental health supports, tribal/community engagement, wraparound

Examples of this strategy in action:
1. Provide in-school mental health services.
    • The [Fort Peck Health Promotion Disease Prevention](#) program provides an array of school-based health services, including mental health services, at five locations. This program also offers culturally based behavioral health services including equine therapy rooted in American Indian culture.
2. Build local capacity using learned experience to help each other and the community.
    • Peer Support Specialists - The [Montana Peer Support Network](#) provides information, education, training, peer support and resources across the state using their own lived experience. A national shift from a maintenance model of behavioral health and support to a recovery model, where every individual has access to care, choices, and the message that recovery is possible. Becoming a Peer Support Specialist also provides a sustainable avenue of support because it is Medicaid reimbursable.

Resources to put this strategy into practice: • To learn more about the cultural resources in your community, use the [OPI Montana Tribal Resource guide](#) and search by category under "mental health" or "suicide prevention"

Supporting Evidence and Rationale

Sources:

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