

Recommendations to Improve Indian Education in South Dakota

As Provided by the South Dakota Indian Education Advisory Council and the South Dakota Tribal Education Consultation Group. Prepared by Mato Standing High, South Dakota Director of Indian Education. December 19, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The South Dakota Indian Education Advisory Council (IEAC) and the South Dakota Tribal Education Consultation Group (TECG) are hereby sharing crucial recommendations to all stakeholders in South Dakota Indian Education. Both groups are made up of Indian Education experts from across the State and region who put a lot of time and thought into making viable, feasible changes and enhancements to education in South Dakota for the benefit of all.

The following recommendations are meant to communicate ideas for improving Indian Education as well as education universally in the State of South Dakota for the benefit of all young South Dakota scholars. Whether it is the South Dakota Department of Education or a single school, these recommendations should be considered as benefits to all who see the value.

Change happens when people come together for the benefit of all, and the education of our children is the most direct and precious route to create change and a better future.

BACKGROUND

As part of recommendations by Native American Student Achievement Advisory Council the IEAC has been tasked with providing annual reports to provide recommendations for Indian Education in SD. For the purpose of this report and other regular business, the IEAC met six times on the following dates:

September 23, 2018
July 27, 2018
April 20, 2018
February 28, 2018
December 13, 2017
September 24, 2017

This report will also include recommendations from the Tribal Consultation group which was created as an effort by the DOE and Tribal Relations. Tribes were asked to appoint a consultation participant to come together to openly hear what recommendations they have to improve Indian Education in South Dakota. For the purpose of this report the TECG met seven times on the following dates:

September 23, 2018

January 5, 2018

October 18, 2017

December 14, 2017

March 6, 2017

February 13, 2017

January 27, 2017

INDIAN EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Addressing Bullying
 - Bullying isn't something that happens once in a while. It happens in some locations every day, all day. It is nice to recognize it with antibullying "months" or campaigns, but that is not enough. Considering the frequency of bullying and the effects it has on students' abilities to learn and succeed, there needs to be a constant focus. There should be training for administrations, teachers and students on what it is and how it should be addressed. Strength is in numbers and the more people (kids and adults) who show they won't tolerate it will help get rid of the problem.

- Attendance
 - It is well known in South Dakota we have major issues with attendance. A student can't learn, in any system, if they are not present. There are many reasons for attendance issues in Indian Country including impoverished conditions as well as school climate issues. Many students don't want to attend school because of climate issues like bullying as mentioned above. Also, due to the rural nature of our state when poverty is combined with distance, weather and other factors, the propensity for absence exponentiates. Surveys should be conducted within schools with the most severe attendance issues to pinpoint reasons for absence and those specific issues need to be directly addressed.

- Charter school legislation
 - Many states have successful charter school systems. Despite past numerous efforts in South Dakota, our great state has still not passed legislation allowing for charter schools or for current districts to be able to change status as charter schools. Charter schools would provide alternatives to the traditional education system that dominates South Dakota and examining successful models worldwide would allow for South Dakota to ensure the most appropriate options for our state could be implemented.

- Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings implementation
 - Since the creation of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings in 2010, there has been a lot of progress with the development and refinement of them. However, they are not being used anywhere near the level where they have the desired impact they were created with. It is important to make sure all schools are aware of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and are aware they are part of the state standards just like in any other subject area. Along with the actual Understandings, there needs to be statewide training and application of them across all subject areas. Because of the sensitive nature of the cultural aspects of the Understandings, a lot of hesitation exists to use them. However, with training and exposure districts and schools can gain a comfort as they learn the universal ideology and educational value to the students of South Dakota.

- SD history and geography
 - South Dakota history goes back further than the formation of our state. However, that is not what our children are taught to understand. South Dakota geography goes back further than the formation of our state. However, that is not what our children are taught to understand. When we examine South Dakota history and geography exclusively through the Eurocentric lens it has always been presented, we are cheating our students and ourselves. History cannot continue to be presented as a competition of winners and losers. It must be presented as facts. Conquest is a reality in world history but that doesn't make it, or the way it has been historically achieved, correct and celebratory. Being honest about the formation of the United States is a truth that is owed to our young scholars. When a person grows up in South Dakota and has no idea what a treaty is or how they have been broken and affected our very own state, a major disservice is done that continues to create a divide between people who may otherwise

be able to learn from each other and live in harmony. In geographical terms, every single one of the streams, peaks, valleys, buttes and rivers in our state already had names. While learning geographical layout is relatively simple, learning geographical history is not when put into the backdrop of the idea of conquest. As we have seen from the renaming of Black Elk Peak, we can go back to and create new ideas for how we see our state in geographical terms which respects our citizenry and shared heritage. By schools widely using the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings along with local resources and tools like listservs, this can be accomplished.

- Trauma informed instruction/professional development for staff
 - Children who face trauma in many forms are negatively impacted. Once those children try to engage in normal, everyday activities it can be stifling. School administrations and teachers need to be prepared to meet the needs of those particular children. Unfortunately, Indian students in South Dakota are disproportionately impacted by trauma. Trauma informed instruction and professional development should be a focus of schools statewide.
- Recruitment and retention of teachers and support staff which proportionately resembles the student population
 - The teacher shortage in South Dakota affects our whole State but disproportionately affects our Indian Country schools. School Boards, Districts and schools should try to have staffs that proportionally represent the students they serve. One way to accomplish this is to continue the Paraprofessional Scholarship Program, which will be discussed next. This is one way to provide students with teachers who understand who they are culturally, as well as better understand daily conditions students may face. Another recommendation is to create other programs designed to help schools to “grow their own” teachers.

- Continuation of the Paraprofessional Scholarship Program
 - The Paraprofessional Scholarship Program was instituted in 2016 as an effort for schools to “grow their own” teachers. It allowed paras at qualifying schools to be eligible for scholarships to work toward becoming teachers. It was a one-time effort that was funded by a special appropriation. The Program was a joint effort by Black Hills State University and Sinte Gleska University. Any future effort should consider using all of the higher education institutions in the State to provide greater opportunity for scholarship recipients. The effort should be continued so that the teacher shortage can be addressed as well as providing schools with future teachers who understand the needs of school districts who are need of local, home grown teachers.

IEAC participants:

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CONSULTATION MEETINGS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Universal equity training
 - Do educational staffs and workers even have a concept of what equity training is? In today's classrooms diversity is ever increasing and it is important for schools to ensure they are providing equity to all represented groups. Equity should be considered for students relating to race, gender and culture, to name a few. Traditionally, equity training has not been a part of teacher education or professional development. This must change to ensure all students share the same quality experience and education. Schools should be required to ensure all administration and staff have equity training.
- Universal cultural sensitivity training
 - In the same vein for the need for equity training is the need for cultural sensitivity training. Cultural diversity is also increasing in our state. When different cultures are not recognized and acknowledged it is a detriment to those students of diverse cultures. It is important for administrations and staff to be required to understand what different cultural groups they serve in their student population and to ensure they are trained in how to deal with overall cultural sensitivity as well as specific groups.
- Solicitation of input and approval to state plans on issues affecting Indian education
 - With the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which requires states to engage in tribal consultation at the local education agency level, there is great hope here in this requirement which has never existed before. But, overall at the state level it is important for those affected by legislation and policies to have a voice. Using existing bodies like the IEAC and the TCEG, as well as Tribal Education Directors, direct and consistent communication regarding state plan details that affect tribal students will only mean improvement for education as a whole.

- Mandating Indian education for all
 - There have already been legislative attempts to require some form of Indian Education for All in South Dakota schools to expose all South Dakota students to Indian history, culture and language. None of them have been successful. However, the TEGC feels strongly that mandating an educational component across the state to teach more about Indian history, culture and language at all levels and subject matter is crucial to the advancement of Indian Education, student success and race relations.
- Publicizing success in Indian Education
 - Even though there is typically a negative narrative and a deficit approach to Indian Education, there are many good and successful things happening in South Dakota. If the State and Tribes could work together to create a publicity effort to highlight the successes, the narrative and approach may change. There are successes like immersion schools for South Dakota native languages as well as accreditation bodies involving how schools in Indian Country works.
- Accreditation reviews on the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding
 - Currently there is no incentive for districts and schools to implement the general application of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings because it is not a requirement. However, if at least there were a review of what districts, schools and teachers are using the Understandings, it would show the success of the use as well as create incentive for other schools to implement them.
- Creating repositories of local resources for language and culture experts
 - There are extensive and rich resources available to support Indian Education across South Dakota. From individuals with knowledge of all aspects of the Lakota/Nakota/Dakota culture to museums and other valuable informational resources, the State and Tribal Education Departments should partner in identifying and tracking local resources to support Indian Education across the State. This effort will add to the

breadth and value of Indian Education in South Dakota and could be shared by tools such as listservs.

- Praxis assistance
 - In being consistent with the need for high quality, local teachers for schools in Indian Country, we need more. One of the biggest obstacles for prospective teachers from South Dakota Indian Country is passing the Praxis test. It would be great to have a study of why the test is such an obstacle. There is research in other areas of testing that cultural bias and other factors can make testing harder for some groups of people. In any case, despite the reasons, a solution needs to be found to the issue. If there were a mechanism that helped prospective teachers prepare more for the test, it would be highly beneficial to the success of those prospects in passing the test.
- Data sharing and reporting with and to tribes for data not publicly accessible
 - With proper administrative documents in place such as Memorandums of Understanding or Memorandums of agreement, to name a few, data should be shared between the State and Tribes which is not publicly accessible. This would ensure the best possible position for both entities to assess and improve education.

TECG participants:

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CONCLUSION

The proceeding recommendations would be a tremendous start to address Indian Education. As mentioned, these recommendations should be considered by any and all entities who deal with Indian Education, including but not limited to: The State Department of Education, Tribal Education Departments, schools, districts and school boards.

This report has the benefit of literally hundreds of years of experience from the members of both the Indian Education Advisory Council and the Tribal Consultation Group. These recommendations are a result of that vast expertise and experience and should be considered as best practices.