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STORYTELLER

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In this edition of the G&G Storyteller Newsletter, with schools starting back up, and summer winding down, we highlight Native American Education. We focus on the origins of Native Education with the negative impacts of boarding schools, we then focus on Tribal Head Start and Language revitalization efforts in Yurok Nation. We then look at how Tribes are re-asserting their sovereignty and reclaiming culture with charter schools. Lastly, we direct our attention to how Tribal Colleges have a positive impact on Native communities and focus on the efforts of California Indian Nations College towards becoming the first accredited Tribal College in the State.

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BOARDING SCHOOLS

Between 1869 and the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Native American children were forcibly removed from their homes and families and placed in boarding schools operated by the federal government and the churches. The legacy of boarding schools is Intergenerational Trauma and Historical Trauma which is collective emotional and psychological injury over a lifespan and across generations, resulting from the history of genocide. Over many generations Native people have experienced traumatic events that have had enduring consequences for our families and communities.

The Department of the Interior announced next steps on the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, launched in June 2021 by Secretary Deb Haaland as the first-ever effort by the federal government to recognize the troubled legacy of past federal Indian boarding school policies with the goal of addressing their intergenerational impact and shedding light on past and present trauma in Indigenous communities. Assistant Secretary of the

Interior for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland states “For the first time in the history of the United States, the federal government is accounting for its role in operating Indian boarding schools that forcibly confined and attempted to assimilate Indigenous children. This report further proves what Indigenous peoples across the country have known for generations – that federal policies were set out to break us, obtain our territories, and destroy our cultures and our lifeways.”

Despite this negative past with the boarding school history, Tribal Nations are taking education into their own hands today turning this negative into a positive. Tribes are making education systems their own and asserting Tribal Sovereignty in the process. Tribal Nations are doing this through their own education systems which teach the true history of these boarding schools as well as: native language revitalization, culture reclamation, and traditional/contemporary arts and skills.



TRIBAL HEAD START



Tribal Head Start launched 34 American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start programs in the summer of 1965. Today, there are around 44,000 children of AIAN heritage served, both in AIAN programs and in non-tribal programs. The Office of Head Start (OHS) honors the rich cultural heritage of our AIAN children, families, and communities. Based on the needs of local communities, Head Start programs offer traditional language and cultural practices to provide high-quality services to young children and their families.

For thousands of years before Western settlers arrived, the Yurok thrived in dozens of villages along the Klamath River in present day Northwest California. By the 1990s, however, academics had predicted their language soon would be extinct. As elders passed away, the number of native speakers dropped to six. But Tribal leaders would not let the language die. At last count, there were more than 300 basic Yurok speakers, 60 with intermediate skills, 37 who are advanced and 17 who are considered conversationally fluent, and those numbers are increasing year after year. The decimation of Native languages dates to the 19th century, when tens of thousands of Native American children across the country, were sent to government-run boarding schools. The effort to assimilate the youth into Euro-American culture pressed them to abandon their own culture and languages. Often, they were beaten for speaking in their native tongues. “The schools had a big negative impact on us. It’s how we lost our language,” said James Gensaw, 31, among the small staff of the tribal language program. “Now the schools are helping us to keep it alive.”

Carole Lewis and Jim McQuillen, who both work with the Tribal language program for the Yurok Tribe, remember being taught language by their elders. Like others of their generation, McQuillen and his seven siblings didn’t hear their fluent mother speak much Yurok. Some revival efforts began in the 1970s, but they did not take off until after the nearly 6,000-member tribe received federal recognition and formed a government in 1992. Over the years, Lewis and McQuillen have taught the Yurok language to preschoolers at the tribal-run Head Start program. “The elders would say things one way one time and another way another time,” McQuillen said. When asked why, they often could not answer. Then in 2001, UC Berkeley linguists launched the Yurok Language Project. Professor Andrew Garrett and a colleague reworked an early grammar guide and collaborated with elders on a dictionary. The online written and audio version of the dictionary has been hailed as a national model. Since then, many other Tribal Nations have followed suit and created language programs not only for Head Start programs, but teens, adults, and elders.



NATIVE AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOLS



On the site of a former Indian boarding school, where the federal government attempted to strip children of their tribal identity, the Native American Community Academy now offers the opposite: a public education designed to build from each student's traditional culture and language. The charter school, NACA, located in Albuquerque, NM, opened its doors in 2006. Today, it enrolls roughly 500 students from 60 different tribes in grades K-12, honoring their Indigenous heritage with land-based lessons and language courses built into a college prep education model. Over the past decade, NACA's academic track record and reputation with families and tribal leaders has spurred the creation of a network of schools designed to overhaul education for Native students across the American West. At 13 campuses in five states, the NACA Inspired Schools Network supports tribal communities that have found little support in traditional K-12 systems and want academic alternatives that reflect their hopes for the next generation. As of now there are network Native American Charter schools in New Mexico, Colorado, California, South Dakota, and Minnesota. There are also many other Tribally controlled charter schools throughout the United States that are not part of the NACA Network.

"In 150 years, we moved from a foreign, abusive, violent structure to now, where maybe our communities have something to say about where education is going," said Anpao Duta Flying Earth (Lakota, Dakota, Ojibwe, Akimel O'odham), the network's executive director. "We're leading these schools. We're in the classrooms. It's not just maintaining status quo. It's how we're pushing the edge of what's possible."



TRIBAL COLLEGES



Tribal colleges and universities provide dynamic higher education opportunities, on or near reservation lands. Known for their remarkable programs, tribal colleges allow students to further their careers, attain an advanced degree, or better support their communities. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are chartered by their Tribal governments, including the ten tribes within the largest reservations in the United States. The 35 accredited TCUs operate more than 90 campuses and sites in 15 states, covering most of Indian Country and serve students from more than 250 federally recognized Indian tribes. TCUs vary in enrollment (size), focus (liberal arts, sciences, workforce development/training), location (woodlands, desert, frozen tundra, rural reservation, urban). Tribal culture and identity are at the core of every Tribal College, and they all share the mission of tribal self-determination and service to their communities. TCUs provide many services to help students stay in school and complete their studies, such as personal and career counseling, mentoring, tutoring, wellness programs, childcare, lending of laptops, and transportation and housing assistance. Community members often take advantage of the TCU libraries and computer labs, as well as a range of community service programming, such as business incubators and healthy lifestyles awareness events.

Although California has the largest Native American population, it hasn't had an accredited tribal college or university since D-Q University in 2005. According to the U.S. 2020 Census, California had a Native American population of 631,016 compared to Montana with a Native American population of 67,612. Despite this difference, Montana boasts seven accredited tribal colleges and California has none. California Indian Nations College, which is chartered by the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians, is looking to change that and lead the way in attaining accredited TCU status in California. Other TCU efforts in the Golden State include California Tribal College in Woodland and Kumeyaay Community College in El Cajon. Together, these three institutions have formed the Tribal Colleges of California Coalition. California Indian Nations College is anticipated to receive accreditation in 2025. A long and overdue victory for Native people and Tribal Nations in the State of California.

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