

NIEA WHOLE CHILD INITIATIVE FINDINGS

Education Sovereignty “It begins with Us”

Listening Sessions Conducted by the National Indian Education Association and the Center for Educational Improvement and its Coalition for the Future of Education

In March 2023, the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), with support from the Center for Educational Improvement (CEI) and its Coalition for the Future of Education, conducted a series of three virtual listening sessions with Native educators, families, community members, policymakers, and allied stakeholders. The NIEA invited the CEI as an ally based on its experience in engaging communities to support transformational education systems focused on collective healing and whole child learning.

A Paradigm Shift to Implement Learning Systems – Major Findings

- Promising Educational Practices for Native Youth
- Educational Sovereignty
- State and Regional Initiatives
- Compassionate Healing Practices
- The Unique Strengths and Needs of Individual Tribes
- More Resources, Better Financing, Research and Policy Changes


We must create learning systems, not education systems. We must create learning opportunities that embrace what we know, how we know it, and how we apply it. And I remind you that this prioritizes children's social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, physical, and mental needs. NIEA doesn't focus on academic until we have met the whole child.

— Diana Cournoyer, NIEA Executive Director

Education Sovereignty through the lens of Prevention is a Protective Factor that contributes to healing for students, families and communities.

— Melanie Johnson & Raquel Ramos, NIEA Whole Child Initiative





NIEA's listening sessions and whole child work is focused on creating a Framework that is part of the academic wheel & closing gaps that address the social, mental, spiritual, physical and emotional needs of Native students.

Listening Sessions By The Numbers

81

Tribes represented.

520

Participants, comprised of educators, policy makers, & family members.

41

States represented.

24

Representing Agencies with school districts, most frequently represented.

50

Represented Positions, with director of schools most represented.

Concerns expressed during the sessions:

- Furthering equity and inclusion
- Native voices not being heard
- Racism and systemic barriers that Native American students face
- Funding and lack of resources for students & their families
- Educating students about truth - and accurate portrayal of history
- Lack of effective leadership and quality education
- Community engagement and educational understanding
- Student and family mental health and well-being
- Defining student success
- Lack of parental involvement
- Lack of Native representation

Recommendations for the future of education for Native students:

- Build tribal education capacity
- Advocate for Native education
- Integrate Native culture and language into the curriculum
- Implement a cultural pedagogy supporting family dynamics of Native children
- Develop a whole child vision
- Foster identity and sense of belonging
- Create policy changes in public schools to honor Native preferences

For more information, please contact Melanie Johnson at Mjohnson@niea.org

