

NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Comprehensive Student Services (OCSS), Indian Education

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Nevada Department of Education Annual American Indian Education Summit Report

Dates: March 26–28, 2025

The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) hosted its Annual American Indian Education Summit (Summit) on March 27–28, 2025, highlighting innovative strategies designed to uplift Native student voices and promote collective action across the educational spectrum from early learners to post-secondary students.

A series of pre-summit events took place on March 26, 2025, including the Educational Tribal Leadership Roundtable, held in conjunction with the Summit. This gathering brought together tribal leaders from across Nevada with NDE leadership to discuss statewide education priorities for American Indian students. The roundtable highlighted the importance of having meaningful consultation among the state, local school districts, and tribal nations guided by the principles outlined in the NDE's Indian Education Plan.

Two working sessions were held simultaneously: the Indian Education Advisory Committee (IEAC) Meeting and a Curriculum Lesson Planning Session.

Hosted by the Nevada Department of Native American Affairs, the IEAC meeting focused the IEAC Strategic Plan and discussing key topics such as the state's fee waiver policy.

At the time of the Summit, the Native American Indian Curriculum Enhancement Project was in its second and final phase, it was presented as a joint effort between the NDE, the Department of Native American Affairs, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The project centers on integrating Indigenous perspectives into new lesson plans by working closely with tribal leaders and elders.

March 26, 2025

Igniting Change: The Path to Collaboration, Advocacy, & Leadership

As a pre-conference event to the Indian Education Summit, working sessions were held on the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Lesson Plan Project, alongside the Indian Education Advisory Committee meeting, which took place from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Between 3:00 p.m. to approximately 7:00 p.m., a roundtable held between the State Deputy Superintendent, Nevada Department of Education staff shared last year's Summits priorities that aimed to foster deeper collaboration between tribal communities, school districts, and the state, as well as on the Nevada Indian Education Action Plan. During the 2024 Indian Education Summit, we reviewed data that led to the Priorities for Action with tribal and district leaders. Together, at the 2024 Summit we identified three key priorities, as well as wise practices and resources to address them.

The three priorities are:

- **Chronic Absenteeism:** Measurably increasing student attendance and engagement.
- **Graduation:** Measurably increasing high school graduation rates.
- **Student Identification:** Ensuring the accurate identification of American Indian students.

Participation in the Roundtable was by invitation only and was extended to tribal leadership and their education directors or representatives. Tribal leaders were encouraged to participate in this critical dialogue.

Tribal leaders that participated in the Educational Tribal Leadership Roundtable:

1. Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Indians
2. Duck Valley Shoshone-Paiute Tribe
3. Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe
4. Fort McDermitt Paiute Tribe
5. Moapa Band of Paiute Indians
6. Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
7. Reno-Sparks Indian Colony
8. Walker River Paiute Tribe
9. Washoe Dresslerville Tribal Community Council

March 27-28, 2025
Indian Education Summit

The Nevada Department of Education's Indian Education Summit was established in 2008 through the efforts of committed individuals and organizations. The inaugural event, held in March 2008, was a collaboration between the Nevada Indian Commission (now the Department of Native American Affairs) and the University of Nevada, Reno's Center for Student Diversity (now the Multicultural Center). The Summit serves as a platform to bring together educators and tribal leaders from across the state to discuss the status and future of American Indian education in Nevada. Since its inception, the Summit has continued to grow, featuring both local and national presenters who address the academic achievement needs of American Indian students.

This year's theme, *Igniting Change: The Path to Collaboration, Advocacy, and Leadership*, set the tone for the Summit's discussions. On the first day, tribal communities, school and district leaders, and educators came together to reflect on shared goals and strengthen partnerships. The second day focused on exploring innovative strategies to elevate student voices and inspire collective action across all levels of education from early learners to post-secondary students.

Here is a summary of the presentations from the Indian Education Summit, held Thursday and Friday, March 27–28, 2025, under the theme:

“Igniting Change: The Path to Collaboration, Advocacy, & Leadership.” A Collaborative Summit uniting tribal communities and educators across Nevada to amplify Native student voices and promote educational equity.

1. Indigenous Sovereignty in Higher Education

Dr. Cornel Pewewardy addressed Indigenous self-determination in academia through community-anchored and data-informed practices.

2. Language & Culture Revitalization

Reno-Sparks Indian Colony Language & Culture Staff shared early education strategies and hosted language stations led by fluent elders in Numu, Newe, and Washiw.

3. ESSA Tribal Consultation

Representatives from WCSD & CCSD explored ongoing tribal consultation practices that strengthen school-tribal relations under federal education law.

4. Imposter Syndrome in Higher Education

Hadia Kalsoom & Rayelle Sims discussed challenges faced by Women of Color in academia and shared empowerment strategies.

5. **Indigenous Mentorship in Higher Education**
Dr. Robin Minthorn led conversations on building support systems for Indigenous scholars through intentional mentorship and community care.
6. **Seal of Biliteracy & Language Preservation**
Updates and future goals for including Great Basin languages in Nevada's State Seal of Biliteracy, promoting academic recognition for Native language speakers.
7. **Strength-Based Recruitment Approaches**
Kari Emm highlighted postsecondary preparation that values students' cultural and ecological knowledge.
8. **Tribal Youth Mentorship in LEAs**
WCSD's Native American Education team emphasized relational approaches and leadership opportunities for Native youth.
9. **Indigenizing Academic Spaces**
Reflections and strategies from *Drs. Minthorn & Pewewardy* on strengthening Indigenous visibility in higher education.
10. **Indigenous Food Sovereignty**
Lance Owyhee examined food justice and cultural sustainability efforts at UNR.
11. **Paiute Language Revitalization in McDermitt**
Elders and teachers shared their multi-generational approach to maintaining language and identity.
12. **Nevada Indian Education Plan Update**
NDE representatives presented their upcoming five-year plan and discussed current initiatives.
13. **Community Connections**
Informal Q&A with *Drs. Pewewardy and Minthorn*, creating space for relationship-building and reflection.
14. **Young Mustangs – Natchez Elementary Language Program**
WCSD educators showcased how early learners are immersed in Numu language and culture to build identity and resilience.
15. **Walker River's Native Youth Community Project**
Presented strategies on college and career readiness rooted in community collaboration.
16. **RSIC UNITY Youth Chapter**
Youth-led presentation on how they are leading community initiatives and revitalizing culture through the United National Tribal Youth framework.

17. Building Supportive Communities in Higher Education

UNR staff discussed retention, belonging, and supporting Indigenous students on campus.

18. Lesson Plan Sharing

NDE consultants led a role-playing session to rethink curriculum delivery and student engagement.

19. Indian Education Strategic Plan Roundtable

Collaborative feedback session with the Indian Education Advisory Committee on the upcoming statewide strategy.

20. Historical Impacts of Federal Policy

Stacey Montooth contextualized educational inequities through the lens of federal boarding school history and its enduring effects.

Alongside a diverse lineup of workshops, the Summit opened with a meaningful invocation by tribal elder Reynelda James, setting a profound tone of unity and respect. Opening remarks were delivered by distinguished leaders, including State Superintendent Jhone Ebert; Daphne Emm-Hooper, Director of Indigenous Relations at the University of Nevada, Reno; and Stacey Montooth, Executive Director of the Department of Native American Affairs.

Two especially meaningful presentations took place during the event. The UNITY Student Panel, composed of youth leaders from the Dicutta UNITY Council, shared personal stories about their journeys in education, leadership, and cultural identity. They also discussed how grant programs like the Native Youth Community Project grant, a U.S. Department of Education grant through the Nevada Department of Education has supported their pursuit of college and career readiness opportunities. Their voices provided powerful insight into the challenges and triumphs of Native youth.

Two exceptional individuals were recognized for their lifelong dedication to Paiute language preservation and education: Ralph Burns and Reynelda James. The *Pesa Namanedu Awards* a phrase loosely translated as “something that has been done well”.

Ralph Burns was honored for his outstanding work as a Paiute Language Instructor at the University of Nevada, Reno. His contributions have significantly enriched academic programs and supported the teaching of Northern Paiute at the university level. The Summit proudly celebrated his recent receipt of an Honorary Degree in recognition of his achievements.

Reynelda James was recognized for her remarkable impact as a Paiute Language teacher and for her commitment to the Summit. Since its inception in 2008, she has led the opening prayer, showing her dedication to both education and cultural continuity.

We extend our deepest gratitude to these two distinguished tribal elders for their unwavering support of education and their invaluable contributions to preserving Native languages and traditions for future generations.

Summit Takeaways

- Student voice is central to transformational change.
- Language, culture, and community are powerful tools for academic success.
- Mentorship and sovereignty in education are vital to honoring Indigenous identity.
- Collaboration between tribes, educators, and institutions remains key to building a more inclusive future for Native students in Nevada.

Mark your calendars! Next year's Summit is scheduled for March 2026! Stay tuned for the official Save the Date announcement.

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to several individuals and organizations whose contributions made the Indian Education Summit possible and impactful.

Special thanks go to Markie Wilder, Assistant Director and Interim Director of the Multicultural Center at the University of Nevada, and Rayelle Sims, Indigenous Student Services Coordinator at the same center, for their support and engagement. We are also deeply grateful to Stacey Montooth, Executive Director of the Nevada Department of Native American Affairs, along with Sarina Nez and Lori Arrive, dedicated staff members who contributed their time and effort.

Our heartfelt thanks to the Indian Education Summit planning committee members, who also serve on the IEAC: Fawn Hunter, Kari Emm, Richard Savage, Margaret Gunshows, and Sara Twiss. They hosted impactful workshops and discussions around elevating Native student voices and driving collective action across educational systems was invaluable. We also acknowledge Kyle Ethelbah for his recent appointment to the committee. Although he was unable to attend due to his dissertation defense, we recognize his commitment. In addition, we acknowledge Lance West, Principal of Schurz Elementary School, who was unable to participate in this year's Summit.

During the Summit's planning phase, the NDE worked in partnership with the Western Educational Equity Assistance Center (WEEAC) at WestEd, alongside the NDE Indian Education staff, to lay the groundwork for a successful event. We are especially thankful to Dr. Niki Sandoval, Malachy McCormick, and Dr. Cecelia Leong of Attendance Works for their valuable contributions. Additional thanks to Julie Bowers (NDE OCSS), Dr. Andrea Koti-Blaga, Fawn Lewis, and Karen Shaw for their ongoing support and coordination.

We were honored to have Lynn Manning John, Principal of Owyhee Combined School and tribal citizen of the Duck Valley Shoshone-Paiute Tribe, return as the Master of Ceremony. We also welcomed Mr. James (JJ) Phoenix, newly appointed Trustee of the Washoe County School Board, a tribal citizen from the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe

This year's Summit was made more accessible through scholarships funded by the NDE's Native Youth Community Project (NYCP) grant and American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, allowing tribal representatives and school district staff to attend. Unlike previous years, which relied solely on registration fees, this support helped ensure broader and more inclusive participation.

If we have inadvertently missed anyone, please accept our heartfelt apologies and know that your contributions are deeply appreciated.