

Chairwoman Margaret Doherty
House Education Committee

The disparity in academic performance seen amongst our students is due to many factors. The Native American community is disproportionately affected by many of our society's biggest challenges, domestic violence, sexual assault, alcohol and substance abuse, disproportionate suicide rates, lack of adequate health care access, and of course our strained educational system. It's important to understand that the legacy of educational institutions with regard to Native Americans is a sordid one. Due to the use of boarding schools to separate parents from their children, and in turn the children from their culture, there is ingrained distrust of schools. Additionally, major gaps were created in the ability to pass on parenting skills and generational knowledge was lost. Our organization works throughout the school year to help support youth and their parents as our community works hard to rebuild itself and overcome these historical traumas. Most of this work is done through educational support and strategizing with students and parents to engage teachers, counselors, and set academic and behavioral goals.

However, summer is a time where many of our Native American students are especially vulnerable. A large proportion of the students we work with are behind the basic benchmarks in math, reading, and writing. Still, our students work hard during the school year and for many of them school is a place of consistency that is missing at home. School is a place where there are supportive adults, safety, and food (many of our students face food insecurity). To support students, their parents, and the schools, we have case workers, after school programs, family gatherings, and sports services for the students.

The challenges we face in helping our students along their educational path are amplified when these students don't have a regular safe place to be during the summer months. Unstable homes and life below the poverty line provide little opportunity for learning and enrichment. The NAYA Camp Rise provides cultural arts, sports clinics, cooking classes, environmental education, gardening, fun science experiments, and other activities for Kindergarten – 8th grade students. We've have tried our best to leverage what funding we can in order to also hire teachers to provide math and language arts education for these students. We also participate in the summer 9th Grade Leaders program to help prepare students transitioning into high school. Additionally, we offer our Summer Ascend program to help high school students recover credits. We serve roughly 175 students through these programs. We're able to provide students with free meals through the ODE's reimbursable meal program. Through any funding sources and community partners we can find we try our best to offer a safe, enriching, and positive space youth four weeks of each summer. Despite our best efforts to not turn any youth away, we are limited in how many students we can afford to serve. For example, our Camp Rise sees an increase in enrollment every year (surpassing 100 this past summer) and we have many more applicants that we just don't have enough resources to serve.

Our camp is the only option the majority of our students have. Without it their families don't have the means to get their children involved in summer programs. We've been able to provide youth these programs at times of especially high vulnerability. For the children of women taking refuge in shelters, our summer camp is a positive place to be each day. We give Native American youth recently arriving from reservations a place to be with other Native American youth to lessen the culture shock of the new urban environment. Providing food for kids who depended on the school lunch program to meet most of their basic nutritional needs is something we can offer as well. Yet, there is so much more need than we can meet despite our efforts.

Even considering the successes of our program we are fully aware and humbled by the fact we can only do so much. There are so many youth in Oregon who have no safe, educational, or positive place to be during the summer. For these reasons the Native American Youth and Family Center supports a Summer Learning Advisory Council. We fully support House Bill 4050. Please support House Bill 4050 so more students can have the opportunities like those I've described above.

On behalf of the Native American Youth and Family Center we thank you,

Daniel Rowell
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