

# Tribal Attendance Pilot Project (TAPP)

## PENDLETON SCHOOL DISTRICT

### WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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#### **TAPP objective:**

The Pendleton School District TAPP retains the focus of developing and documenting specific strategies to address factors that impact students' ability to attend school, forming relationships with tribal and district partners to create wrap-around services to support American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in school, and creating a system to incentivize student attendance.

#### **TAPP Action Plan:**

This project is developed entirely through the collaborative efforts of the Pendleton School District and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). The Family Advocate will be employed by the district but will be an individual who has strong connections to the CTUIR community. The individual will be selected from a candidate list that is approved by the CTUIR Education Department. This project is one more step in the collaborative efforts to eliminate the achievement gap that exists between our American Indian/Alaska Native students and their peers in the Pendleton School District.

The Family Advocate will be based at Washington Elementary School and will work closely with our CTUIR students and their families to reduce absenteeism in this group of students. As a part of this project, the Advocate will build upon current services offered in the school district and by the tribe to establish wrap-around services to support students in school attendance.

#### **Profile of school:**

Total Enrollment: 484 students (1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Grade), 166 AI/AN students

<i>First Grade:</i>	92 Students	24 AI/AN
<i>Second Grade:</i>	99 Students	26 AI/AN
<i>Third Grade:</i>	79 Students	34 AI/AN
<i>Fourth Grade:</i>	123 Students	41 AI/AN
<i>Fifth Grade:</i>	91 Students	41 AI/AN

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### **Communication Plan:**

TAPP Article in the East Oregonian, TAPP Article in the Confederated Umatilla Journal, KCUW Radio (Umatilla Reservation Community Radio) interview to discuss TAPP, Principal Van Nice & Brent Spencer, TAPP Presentation to the Pendleton School Board, and TAPP Goals/Incentive Meeting with Pendleton School District Administration.

### **TAPP Efforts:**

Consistent attendance monitoring has been critical in identifying students with absenteeism trends. This allowed for early intervention for students. When students have an unexcused absence, phone calls are made to check on the status of the student. When a parent/guardian cannot be reached, a home visit may be necessary for students who have been labeled “At-Risk”. These students are those who exhibit eighty-five percent attendance or less and have unexcused absences. An attendance team meets weekly and reviews student attendance. The team focuses on students with 90% attendance or less, with extra attention on students below 85% attendance.

Numerous attendance incentives are provided within Washington Elementary School. Monthly attendance awards are provided to students who achieve 95% attendance or higher for the month. “Every Day Matters” awards are provided to classrooms who achieve their attendance goals, and the class is awarded a treat. Weekly attendance competitions are held and the classroom with the highest weekly attendance percentage is awarded an attendance trophy which is housed in their classroom for the week.

Monthly “Family Nights” are held which are intended to provide families with useful information regarding attendance, collaborative support services and updates on TAPP activities. The Family Nights have been well attended and students check in frequently and ascertain about Family Night activities. The Family Nights are attended by the tribal partner and Pendleton School District staff/administration.

The TAPP has collaborated with the CTUIR Education Department Language Program to incorporate Tribal language names into Washington Elementary signage. This collaboration also includes the incorporation of Tribal names onto busses which serve the Tribal community. The goal of these two projects is to provide a better connection for Tribal students and families into the learning environment through the incorporation of the language. In addition to incorporating our language into Washington Elementary, we have worked with Mid-Columbia Bus Company in order to add new bus names in both Umatilla and Weyliitpuu (Nez Perce). These names will be registered with the State of Oregon and placed upon buses whose routes serve our tribal community.

### **TAPP Success:**

School-wide attendance competitions have resulted in increased attendance for both AI/AN students and all students of Washington Elementary. Three large trophies were purchased and are presented each week to the classroom in each “den” with the highest attendance percentage for the previous week. The trophies are moved each Monday morning to the winning classroom. The trophies have provided students an incentive to earn the trophy as well as incentive for winning classes to retain the trophy. The attendance competition started in February. The most significant increase showed in the first grade which improved from 89% to nearly 92%.

The TAPP Family Nights have showed increases in attendance. We are seeing new families at nearly each event while most families have maintained consistent attendance. These events are highly anticipated within Washington Elementary students, who often ask the TAPP Family Advocate when the next event will be held and state they look forward to each event.

We are seeing a higher level of feedback from parents and have reduced the number of “unexcused” absences. Parents have become more likely to call the school and inform of absences.

The TAPP has also facilitated communication and understanding within our school. This has resulted in recognition of cultural activities as learning opportunities. Student absences are recognized as school events when attending tribally sponsored culturally activities and this does not adversely affect student attendance.

### **Lessons Learned as a Family Advocate**

We are making an impact through the relationships we forge within our student body. This dawned on me when I was absent from school due to a TAPP meeting in Salem. Upon my return to school and was immediately welcomed back by several of my students, native and non-native alike. It served as a message that we are making a profound impact on ALL of our students, and they take notice when we are away.

I also received a message from a parent who finally gave into my relentless phone calls and text messages. It was not the reaction I had expected. Instead of showing frustration, the parent indicated they would be supporting their student attending school regularly and even took personal responsibility for the student’s excessive absences. The parent thanked me for not giving up. In another example, I was contacted by a parent for a ride to school for their student. This parent was previously very difficult to work with and even threatened litigation. The parent is now reaching out to the school and me to support their student’s attendance.

These are only a few examples and I am confident each family advocate can tell the same story. These are not the examples which we can measure through data, charts or graphs, *these are the immeasurable moments* where our presence through TAPP is making the biggest difference. These are the examples which indicate the impact we are making within our project sites. These examples are how we pave the way to changing the culture of our school.

### **TAPP Barriers/Challenges:**

The primary challenge in achieving the TAPP goal of increased attendance is tied to families with multiple students with chronic absenteeism. In order to facilitate change within these families, a multi-tiered effort is necessary, which may transcend beyond the reach of Washington Elementary. In response, the TAPP Advocate, Title-VI staff and Washington Elementary staff have reached out to the Tribal partner to seek referral programs through which the families may find support. Consistent communication and information sharing, when permissible, is pertinent. Coordinated efforts have produced results within a portion of our students. Although these students may not achieve attendance targets, measureable increase has occurred in attendance and parents/guardians have increased communication with the TAPP Family Advocate, Title-VI Coordinator and Washington Elementary staff.

### **Role Partners Played:**

Washington Elementary engages in monthly collaboration meetings with the tribal partner, which includes Yellowhawk Behavior Health and the CTUIR Department of Children & Family Services. The Pendleton School District also engages in monthly meetings with PSD Administration and the CTUIR Education Department. Cooperative activities include monthly TAPP Family Nights which are attended by Pendleton School District and CTUIR staff.

### **Sustainability Plan:**

The TAPP has provided an opportunity to implement new incentive programs which have been showing success. These practices are easily repeatable beyond the TAPP. Collaboration with the tribal partner will continue into the future and consistent attendance monitoring will continue through the Tribe's Title-VI program. This will allow for early identification of students with chronic absenteeism. Through the establishment of monthly collaborative meetings with the Tribal partner, wrap-around services may be referred to families by both the Tribal Partner and the Pendleton School District.