

The First Migratory Learners

Identifying and supporting American Indian and Alaska Native migratory students

Many American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) families continue to follow seasonal migration patterns that have been passed down since time immemorial. This involves visiting traditional hunting, fishing, and harvesting sites at specific times of the year. For families who follow these migratory patterns, these activities are an opportunity to teach their children cultural traditions, skills, and ways of understanding and living in the world. Students may miss school days and instructional time due to these activities and may face cultural barriers, including educators' lack of knowledge and understanding of these traditions (Free, Kriz, & Konecnik, 2014). This infographic offers strategies that educators can use to build their awareness of these cultural traditions and address the needs of this often-overlooked population of students.

The AIAN migratory experience is unique. For decades, the U.S. government sought to remove Native Americans from their traditional homelands, separate them from their cultural traditions and resources, and force their assimilation into mainstream culture. This included a long history of removing Native children from their families and sending them to boarding schools where, among other things, they were forbidden to speak their own language or practice their cultural traditions. Despite this traumatic history, many traditional Indigenous cultural practices—including seasonal migration patterns—have endured.

The strategies in this infographic may help school and district personnel improve identification and supports for AIAN students whose families follow traditional migration patterns and who may qualify for migrant education services.

Note on terminology

American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) refers to groups of people having origins to any Indigenous people in the current United States and who maintain Tribal affiliation or community attachment.

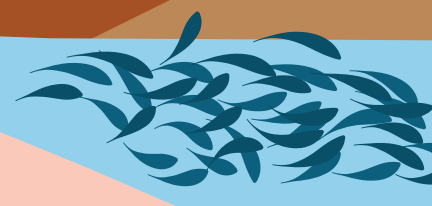
Native American is a broader term that includes groups of people that are indigenous to North, South, and Central America.

These terms are used interchangeably in this infographic. It is important to remember that there are hundreds of Native American groups with distinct governance, traditions, languages, values, and beliefs; Native Americans are not a monolithic ethnic or cultural group. Federal and state programs may use different terminology to determine program access and eligibility.

The Office of Migrant Education

provides supports and additional guidance based on each state's counts of eligible migratory children, age 3 through 21. States may use funds to identify and provide educational supports including preschool services; academic supports; and bilingual, multicultural, and vocational instruction. Additional resources may be found through specific program links.

➔ <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-migrant-education/>



Identifying and supporting AIAN migratory students

Schools, districts, and individual teachers can all play an important role in helping AIAN migratory students feel supported, valued, and honored. The strategies described in this infographic build and maintain trust between the education system and Native students, families, communities, and Tribes. The research-based practices may support school engagement for all AIAN students so that they may achieve academic and cultural success.

Identifying and supporting AIAN migratory students affirms their cultural identity and their unique political and historical status in the contemporary school system. AIAN students should have the supports necessary to meet high expectations in the classroom, as well as practice cultural milestones. Native American traditions of seasonal migration should not be viewed as missed classroom time but as an essential part of the ongoing cultural, physical, social, and emotional development of many Native children and youth.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT NATIVE MIGRATORY STUDENTS

AIAN migratory students may live in established homes and participate in traditional seasonal migrations for only short periods, as compared to other families who move locations for longer periods of seasonal work.

Based on family dynamics and decisions, students may experience different opportunities and timing of traditional seasonal learning and migration activities. Therefore, some students from the same family may attend school while others participate directly in cultural activities away from the building.

Students may not be able to share details of their migratory activities and may provide only a general reason for being out of school.

Engage Native communities

Establish a connection with parents, families, and Tribal community leaders to build understanding of the cultural traditions that AIAN migratory students may be practicing. They carry cultural knowledge and practices across generations.

Connect with Tribal education or cultural directors to learn about migratory activities and events that may affect students' attendance, including the history and cultural importance of those activities.^{1,3,4,6,7,8}

Validate students' home cultures by understanding and addressing inaccurate portrayals of AIAN history, culture, and experiences.^{1,2,6,8,9}

Connect with local Tribes to learn about the contemporary issues they face and co-develop solutions.^{1,2,6,8,9}

Recognize and address any possible uncertainties or negative feelings about school policies and actions that may stem from prior schooling experiences and the traumatic history of Indian boarding schools.^{3,4,6,8}

Promote cultural resiliency

Develop tools, lessons, and resources that meet high academic standards and honor students' heritage. AIAN cultural resiliency connects community beliefs, values, and worldviews as part of positive transformation.⁵

Use tribally specific resources and lesson plans provided by Tribes, state-level Native education departments, and other Native organizations.^{2,3,6,8}

Plan and implement academic lessons that promote learning concepts through inquiry, cooperation, and a supportive classroom environment.^{6,8,9}

Promote college and career goal planning with students and explain how those goals align with community needs and resiliency. Encourage student-centered teaching approaches to ensure academic progress towards the college and career goals.^{2,6,7,8,9}

Gather input and insight from Tribes, families, and students. Their feedback will illuminate student needs and highlight opportunities to connect cultural values to students' college and career aspirations.^{1,2,3,6,9}

Improve identification and supports

Review data, policy, and procedures to improve identification and support of AIAN migratory students and families.

Provide professional learning opportunities for educators at all levels to incorporate culturally responsive practices and ways to address possible academic and discipline gaps or disparities.^{2,3,6,7,8,9}

Ensure policies are applied fairly by using culturally responsive protocols and feedback loops with educators, students, and families, recognizing that AIAN migratory students are highly vulnerable to disproportionate negative disciplinary outcomes.^{1,2,3,6,7,8,9}

Create spaces to authentically engage students, families, and caregivers that may be outside typical meeting protocols. Identify other community locations and times to meet; extend invitations to family members such as uncles, grandparents, and siblings; and allow families to set the tone by leading communication.^{1,2,3,6,7,8}

Review school and program intake forms to include Tribal affiliation and examples of possible migratory experiences to improve AIAN identification. Engage partners familiar with Tribal communities to provide context and support for the use and completion of intake forms.^{1,3,6}

This is an example of a fish trap basket used by several Pacific Northwest Tribes. Basketry is a traditional technology and art that is passed down through generations. These baskets are durable for many seasons and vary based on the available resources and need. Educators can leverage AIAN migratory students' knowledge of traditional skills like basketry across various content areas.



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Resources for incorporating tribally specific lessons in the classroom

National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Student-Centered Digital Learning Activities Includes digital education tools, tribally specific standards-based lesson plans, activities, and resources for grades prekindergarten through 8. <https://www.niea.org/new-blog-2/student-centeredlearningactivities>

Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian - Native Knowledge 360° Features webinars for teacher professional learning and student discovery as well as educational resources for standards-based instructional units regarding historical and contemporary issues. <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360>

Indian Education for All (MT) The Montana Office of Public Instruction's repository of tribally specific lesson plans, videos, resources, and opportunities for professional learning. <https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All>

Tribal History/Shared History (OR) The Oregon Department of Education's repository of tribally specific lesson plans, videos, toolkits, and professional learning opportunities. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Pages/Senate-Bill-13-Tribal-HistoryShared-History.aspx>

Since Time Immemorial (WA) The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's repository of tribally specific lesson plans, videos, resources, toolkits, and professional learning opportunities. <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/time-immemorial-tribal-sovereignty-washington-state>

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