



Reaching Out to American Indian and Alaska Native Youth with Disabilities

In this guide, NAPTAC explores how Parent Centers might plan and conduct outreach to American Indian and Alaska Native youth who have disabilities.

This guide has been written by Norrine Smokey-Smith for the Native American Parent Technical Assistance Center (NAPTAC).

Reaching Out to American Indian and Alaska Native Youth with Disabilities

In this guide, NAPTAC explores how Parent Centers might plan and conduct outreach to Native American and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth with disabilities. The guide is meant to support Parent Centers in addressing one of their most recent priorities—that is, *to connect directly with youth who have disabilities and to increase their capacity to be effective self-advocates.*

This critical priority involves quite a broad range of youth capacity building. The specifics of the Parent Center priority are listed on the last page of this document. This NAPTAC guide describes many of the possible connections and collaborations that Parent Centers can explore as part of their outreach activities to, and work with, AI/AN youth with disabilities.

Effective Ways of Outreaching to Native Youth with Disabilities

There is a great need to educate and support families of Native youth with disabilities. American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) as a racial group are most likely to be labeled as needing special education services (SPED).¹ The percentage of AI/AN students receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is nearly twice that of the general population.² Research has shown that culturally diverse students receive more severe punishment than white students for the same behavior. While comprising only 1% of the general population, AI/AN students make up 3% of expulsions and 2% of out of school suspensions, with Native male SPED students comprising the greatest percentage of the latter.³ AI/ANs also have the highest rate of school discipline and are held back more frequently in school.⁴

For these reasons and for reasons of equitable service delivery, it is important for Parent Centers to provide their valuable services to Native families. Knowing where and how to best access Native youth with disabilities will significantly enhance outreach to Native parents and families.

In addition to school-sponsored events, many Native youth can be found at numerous tribal and other cultural gatherings both on and off reservations. These special events and gatherings attract AI/AN people of all ages who come together to socialize and participate in activities that celebrate their cultural heritage. Native youth participate in numerous social activities such as community health fairs, cultural nights, sporting events, youth clubs, leadership conferences,



pow wows, and rodeos. Contacting event coordinators or staff of specific programs and organizations will provide entrée to Native youth and their families.

Organized below are programs that can be found at the local (tribal or school district) level. Resources at the state, regional, and national levels follow. Contact information for these programs and agencies can be found on websites listed throughout this guide.

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES and BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION SCHOOLS

Ninety-three percent of all AI/AN students attend public and charter schools while the remaining 7% attend schools administered by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).⁵ BIE-operated and supported schools plus Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with a significant number of AI/AN students are eligible to receive formula grants from the Office of Indian Education (OIE) in the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to fund Indian education programs. (LEA is a commonly used synonym for a school district.)



The BIE operates or contracts with tribes to operate schools on reservations in nearly half of all states in the nation. Working in concert with Special Education staff and/or administrators in these specific schools will provide Parent Centers with access to Native youth with disabilities. The BIE's website lists all funded schools by state. Visit: <https://bie.edu/Schools/>

TITLE VI PROGRAMS

Title VI formula grant funds from OIE support programs that reinforce unique culturally-related academic needs of Native preK–12 students while helping them to meet challenging state academic standards. Title VI program directors know the number of AI/AN students in each of their district schools. They are invaluable contacts for Parent Centers to connect with families of Native youth with disabilities, and they can also provide contact information for other local and regional programs as well as organizations that serve Native families.

- The number of Title VI grantees by state is listed on the [U.S. Department of Education \(ED\) website](#).
- For a list of LEAs with Title VI programs in your service area, contact either the ED or your state Department of Education.
- For additional Title VI information, view the NAPTAC webinar on Outreach through Title VI, at: <http://naptac.org/resources/for-parent-centers/outreach-titlevi-webinar/>

URBAN INDIAN CENTERS

Urban Indian centers became common in the 1950s during the relocation era of Indian history. The federal government, as part of its ongoing assimilation policy, urged young Native adults to leave their reservations by paying one-way moving expenses to government-designated cities like Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Denver, and Chicago, and by providing basic vocational training.

Instead of assimilating into the general population, many Native relocatees united to form large inter-tribal communities within these cities. Urban Indian centers helped connect urban Natives with public agencies, resources, and services, and provided meeting space as well as opportunities to associate with one another as tribal people. Many of the original urban Indian centers continue to operate today and provide another avenue for Parent Center outreach to Native families and youth with disabilities. See what's available in your area, at: <https://www.ihs.gov/urban/nationalprograms/>



TRIBAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

Many tribes have education departments that provide educational services and opportunities that support tribal youth and adult members. Tribal Education Department (TED) staff often have close working relationships with tribally-run, BIE-operated, and/or public schools on or near their reservation. Therefore, their assistance can be helpful to Parent Centers and others interested in making key contacts within these schools for outreaching to Native youth and families. Developing a close working relationship with TEDs will provide Parent Centers with ongoing opportunities to make and maintain contact with Native youth with disabilities and their families in these schools.

- A list of Federal and State-recognized tribes is located on the National Conference of State Legislatures website, at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/state-tribal-institute/list-of-federal-and-state-recognized-tribes.aspx>
- Parent Centers might also consult the **National Directory of TEDS**, which is the membership organization for the Education Departments of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes. Visit online at: <https://tedna.org/>

TRIBAL TANF PROGRAMS

There are currently 70 approved tribal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) that serve 284 federally-recognized tribes and Alaska Native villages both on and off reservations. Tribes receive federal block grants to design and operate their own welfare programs aimed at promoting work and responsibility, and strengthening families. Find out more about TANF, at: www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tribal/tribal-tanf

Tribal TANF programs actively engage Native families in healthy, productive activities and provide a wide array of resources that help educate parents. Parent Center staff that team with Tribal TANF staff will be more likely to connect with Native families and youth with disabilities.

INDIAN HEALTH CLINICS

The Indian Health Service (IHS) in the DHHS provides for the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of AI/ANs by making services available and accessible to Native people nationwide. On reservations, most tribes have Indian Health clinics and/or wellness centers. In

addition, non-profit urban Indian clinics/health centers operate in 41 locations off the reservation in areas with higher populations of AI/ANs.

Indian Health clinic programs sponsor various events such as health fairs and other activities for patients, their families, and the greater community. Quite often IHS programs partner with outside organizations to enhance the range of services for families and children in their service area. Partnering with IHS program staff gives Parent Centers an excellent opportunity to share disability-related information with Native families and to offer training and other guidance with respect to special education services in our schools.

For more information about the IHS and the locations of its various clinics and programs, visit: <https://www.ihs.gov/locations/>

STATE INDIAN EDUCATION SPECIALISTS

Most states with larger populations of AI/ANs have an Indian Education Specialist or Director within their State Department of Education. These individuals advocate for the academic success of Native students, creating and promoting strategies for integrating the teaching of Native American history, culture, language, and government in student learning. These specialists provide leadership and technical assistance to educators, and they network with a multitude of departments, LEAs, organizations, and programs that provide special services to Native children and families. They also work directly with Tribal Education Departments (TEDs) statewide.

State Indian Education Specialists generally have a more comprehensive overview of resources available to Native students and families throughout the state and therefore are valuable contacts for accessing families of Native youth with disabilities.

A list of State Indian Education contacts is located on the NAPTAC website, at: <http://naptac.org/resources/state-indian-education-contacts/>

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is the oldest bureau within the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDOl). Throughout its 93-year history the BIA was fraught with mismanagement of Native people's land and mineral assets. Currently the BIA is working to transition from a supervisory to an advisory role. With this agency's new mission to partner with tribes, the BIA assists them in achieving their goals for self-determination and maintains its Federal-tribal trust responsibilities through government-to-government relationships.

The *Tribal Leaders Directory* on the BIA website is a valuable resource that provides contact information for each federally-recognized tribe in the U.S. Nationwide there are 12 regional BIA offices located in predominantly urban areas. Like IHS, the BIA is an Indian-preference employer; therefore, a significant number of Native people are employed with this agency.



Outreaching to Native employees and parents within the BIA can be a productive road to connecting with Native youth with disabilities. Access the *Tribal Leaders Directory* at: <https://www.bia.gov/tribal-leaders-directory>

BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION

Established in 2006, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) is charged with improving operations for both tribally-controlled and BIE-operated schools, providing education opportunities to Native youth and adults both on and off tribal reservations. The BIE serves approximately 42,000 Native students attending 183 elementary and secondary schools on 64 reservations in 23 states. Nearly half of these schools are BIE-operated, and the remainder are tribally operated under BIE contracts or grants. In addition, the BIE provides funding to 36 tribal colleges/universities and directly operates both Haskell Indian Nations University in Kansas and the Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in New Mexico.

BIE schools honor the cultural heritage of their students and work to empower them to achieve their highest potential. With the largest concentration of AI/AN students nationwide, BIE schools provide Parent Centers with direct access to Native youth and families. The BIE's website lists all funded schools by state. Visit: <https://bie.edu/Schools/>

POW WOWS

Throughout the country large concentrations of AI/ANs of all ages from diverse tribes/nations gather to celebrate and honor the traditions of their ancestors at pow wows. These social gatherings afford Native people opportunities to connect with and preserve the rich heritage of their culture as well as to renew old friendships and make new ones. Although the majority—and the largest—of them occur during summer months, pow wows take place year-round in urban, rural, and reservation areas. They are great venues for connecting with Native youth and families, and for networking with organizations that provide support services to these families. Sponsoring a Parent Center exhibit booth is a valuable way to outreach to Native families and youth with disabilities. Parent Centers can consult the following website for pow wows in their area: <http://www.powwows.com/>

No one pow wow website has a complete listing of all scheduled events nationwide; therefore, Parent Centers are encouraged to seek out a local or state contact person to get added to a listserv that provides a schedule of pow wows in your service area.

NATIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In addition to local, tribal, school district, and statewide programs, several national organizations work to empower AI/AN youth to develop leadership skills while maintaining cultural values and a strong Native identity. Parent Centers should become familiar with and maintain communication with these groups whose local, regional, or national gatherings might be held in your service area.

- **United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY)** is a national network organization that promotes personal development, citizenship, and



leadership among AI/AN youth through active involvement in their tribal communities. There are many UNITY chapters on reservations and in other Native communities. Their annual national conference draws hundreds of Native teens from all areas of the U.S. and is an ideal event for outreaching to Native youth with disabilities. Find out more at: <http://unityinc.org/native-youth/>

- **American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES)** chapters nationwide offer high school and postsecondary Native students interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields career development as well as strong academic and professional networks to support their study. Like UNITY, AISES holds its national conference annually in different locations nationwide and provides valuable opportunities to connect directly with Native youth with disabilities. Find out more at: <http://www.aises.org/>



- **The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY)** is a national advocacy organization focused on improving the health and well-being of AI/AN youth under the age of 25. Within the Aspen Institute, CNAY manages the National Native Youth Network (NNYN) that connects, engages, and provides special opportunities for Native youth. NNYN is part of the Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) initiative launched in 2014 by President Obama. Native student-chosen Gen-I Ambassadors serve as spokespersons for this initiative and act as community liaisons, sharing resources and opportunities with peers in their tribal communities, drawing strength from their culture, and inspiring one another. <http://www.cnay.org/>

References appear on page 8.



This document was produced under U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs No. H328R130012-14. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred. This product is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint and share this publication is not necessary, the citation should be:



Smokey-Smith, N. (2017, November). *Reaching Native American and Alaska Native youth with disabilities*. Albuquerque, NM: Native American Parent Technical Assistance Center (NAPTAC).

The specifics of the Parent Centers' "youth priority" are as follows:

Recapping the Parent Center Youth Priority

Here are the requirements for Parent Centers, as stated in the Federal Government's Request for Proposal:

Provide high-quality services that increase youth with disabilities' capacity to be effective self-advocates. To meet this requirement, the applicant must include information as to how the services will increase the knowledge of youth with disabilities about—

- The nature of their disabilities, including their strengths and of their academic, behavioral, and developmental challenges;
- The importance of having high expectations for themselves and how to meet those expectations;
- The resources available to support their success in secondary and postsecondary education and employment and full participation in their communities;
- IDEA, section 504, ADA, and other legislation and policies that affect people with disabilities;
- Their rights and responsibilities while receiving services under IDEA and after transitioning to post-school programs, services, and employment;
- How they can participate on IEP Teams; and
- Supported decision making necessary to transition to adult life; and

Increase the capacity of youth with disabilities to advocate for themselves, including communicating effectively and working in partnership with providers.

References

¹ National Indian Education Association. (2016). *Native nations and American schools: The history of Natives in the American education system*. Washington, DC: Author. Available online at:

<http://www.niea.org/nieaflipbook/mobile/index.html#p=1>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.