



Serving and Empowering Native Youth, Families, and Communities

Keri Mabry, LGSW, LMSW, MPhil

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Key Considerations

- **Trauma** is broad and manifests in myriad ways. Research has established that **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** significantly impact future violence victimization and perpetration, as well as lifelong health and opportunity (CDC, n.d.).
- **Trauma-informed interventions** include “understanding the short- and long-term health and wellbeing consequences of policies that impact and harm Native children” (NCTSN, 2023, p. 2).
- Youth and families may be reluctant to engage with service providers, in part due to trauma-related experiences of powerlessness and isolation (NCTSN, 2015). Systems can be traumatizing in and of themselves.
- The **school-to-prison pipeline** involves excessive exclusionary discipline (often for behaviors that are developmentally appropriate or result from trauma) and can begin as early as preschool. School exclusions, including classroom removals and suspensions, result in decreased academic achievement and often lead to youth “dropping out” or being pushed out (Andra et al., 2023).
- Exclusionary discipline disproportionately affects certain groups of students (e.g., students of color, students with disabilities, low-income students, LGBTQ+ students) (Andra et al., 2023). An **intersectional approach** is necessary to comprehend the unique needs of each individual youth.
- The NASW (2021) Code of Ethics calls on social workers to uphold certain core values: **service, social justice, competence, integrity, the dignity and worth of each person, and the importance of human relationships.**

Exclusionary Discipline

Exclusionary discipline results in children experiencing low achievement and isolation from normal school activities.

Students who experience exclusionary discipline often become disengaged from school and are divorced from pro-social interactions and activities.

Exclusionary discipline eventually leads to children being pushed out of schools and into juvenile justice and prison facilities.

Nationally some studies estimate that between 65% - 70% of all youth involved in the juvenile legal system are children with disabilities.

Being suspended just once in the ninth grade doubles the likelihood that students will drop out.

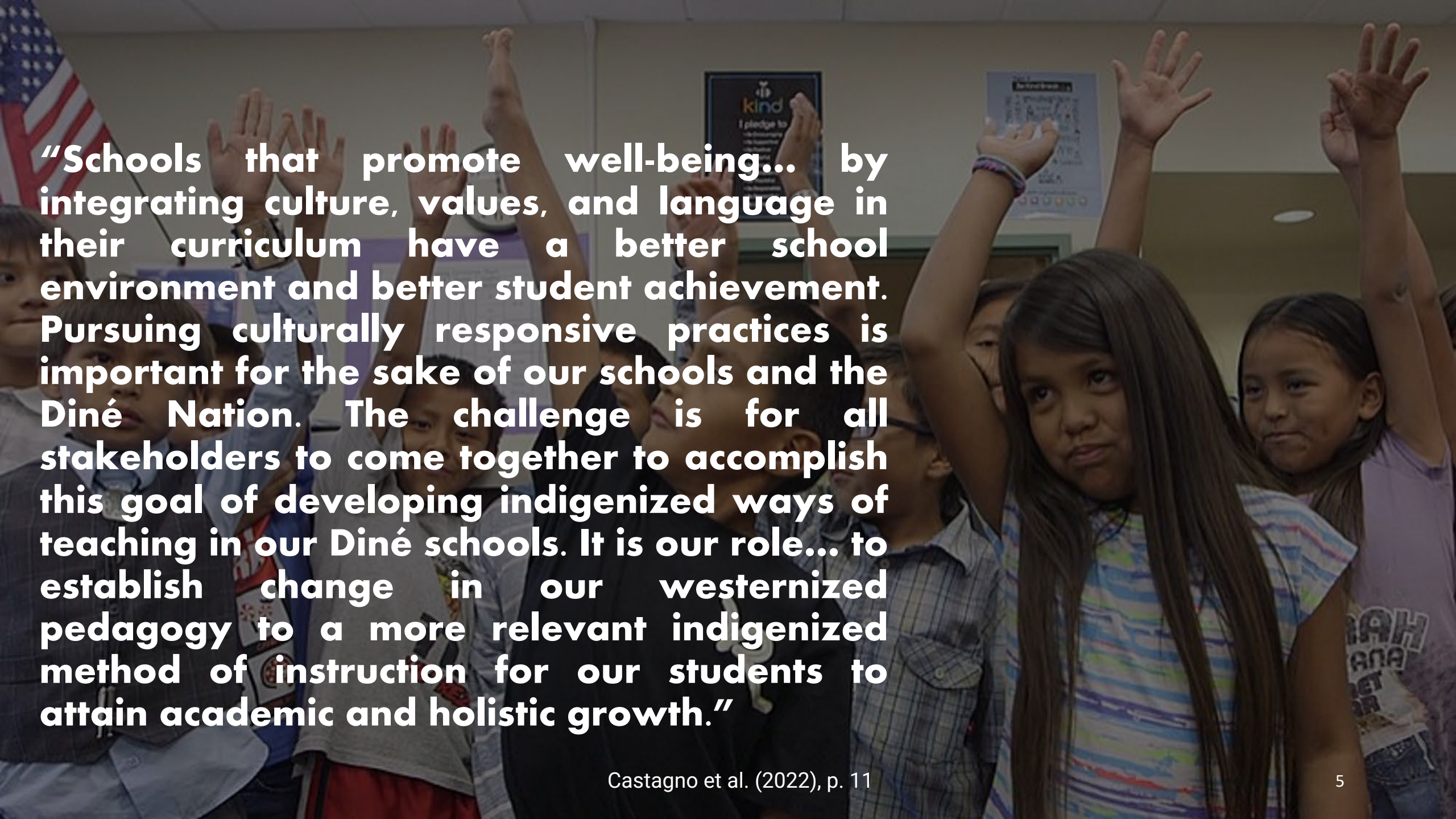
Recommendations

- **OPPORTUNITY FOR AND ACCESS TO SERVICES:**

- **Intervene early** to identify areas of need and help youth to explore and build on their strengths. This may include special education, language services, home-based services, wraparound services, quality evaluations, Know Your Rights trainings, and legal representation for suspension hearings and disciplinary proceedings.
- Foster **holistic, multidisciplinary collaboration** across systems (e.g., funding for medical-legal partnerships, community navigator programs). Recognize the barriers that many individuals face when attempting to access and preserve services.
- Connect youth with **positive activities and supports** in their communities (e.g., therapy, mentoring, sports, arts, internships, vocational training).

- **STRENGTHS-BASED, CLIENT-CENTERED, AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACHES:**

- “Organizations and service systems that serve youth and families should use trauma-informed policies and programming to build and maintain partnerships with schools, law enforcement, child welfare, healthcare, courts, community-based organizations, and adult and peer opinion leaders and advocates” (NCTSN, 2015).
- Challenge the over-policing of schools. Encourage the involvement of professionals with mental health expertise to de-escalate situations and address behavioral concerns. Improve access to **culturally responsive mental health services** in communities and schools.
- Tribes should be co-partners in the development and oversight of policies and programs. Indigenous social workers and providers who understand Indigenous issues and values are well equipped to rebuild and support programs to better serve Indigenous communities (Boykins, 2023).

A group of diverse young students in a classroom, with their hands raised in the air. The background shows an American flag on the left, a poster that says "kind I pledge to" in the center, and another poster on the right. The students are of various ethnicities and are looking towards the camera or slightly to the side.

“Schools that promote well-being... by integrating culture, values, and language in their curriculum have a better school environment and better student achievement. Pursuing culturally responsive practices is important for the sake of our schools and the Diné Nation. The challenge is for all stakeholders to come together to accomplish this goal of developing indigenized ways of teaching in our Diné schools. It is our role... to establish change in our westernized pedagogy to a more relevant indigenized method of instruction for our students to attain academic and holistic growth.”

References

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