

A Presentation for the  
**Commission on Native  
Children**



**Virtual Hearing: K12 Education  
April 1, 2022**

**Dr. Deborah J. Dennison,  
Enrolled member of the Diné Nation**





Ya'at'ééh shi naat'aanii, Commission on Native Children,  
Shi éi Dr. Deborah Dennison yinishye. San Carlos Unified  
School District Olta' naat'aanii alaaji ba dahsidah.  
Scottish-McPerson clan éi nishli,  
Kinyaa'áanii bashishchiin, Scottish McPherson clan éi  
dashicheii, doo éi 'Áshiihíí dashinali. Tohatchi NM naasha.

It is good to connect with each of you to share my  
knowledge, experiences and expertise in the field of  
Indian education.

Today I share with you my strong convictions based on my  
own research and practice in my role as an Indigenous  
woman public school superintendent, also as a leader on  
the National Advisory Council on Indian Education and as  
a business owner of Indigenous Ingenuity created to help  
school leaders serving Indigenous students design and  
implement systemic reforms by integrating and  
correlating with the values and philosophies of  
Indigenous peoples or Indigenous wisdom with western  
education knowledge



## A Legacy from the Past..., A Vision for the Future...

- Cowgirl, Livestock Rancher, Barrel Racer!
- **1980 Graduate of Window Rock High School**
- 1981 Graduate – Navajo Community College (Diné)  
Associate of Arts-Liberal Arts
- **1986 Graduate – University of New Mexico, Bachelor of Arts-Art Education**
- 1997 Graduate – Arizona State University, Master of Education-Ed. Leadership/Policy Studies
- **2001 Graduate – Arizona State University, Doctor of Education-Ed. Leadership/Policy Studies**
- Dissertation Study: *“Relationship Between Stakeholder Perceptions of Effectiveness in Navajo Nation Public High Schools & Student Achievement”*



*“Daddy’s Dark Skin”*

an unpublished memoir of Dr. Dean C. Jackson

## A Legacy from the Past..., A Vision for the Future...



Twins – Dean & Jack Jackson



First School House, Cedar Springs AZ

*“The responsibility for Navajo Western or formal education was first assumed by various religious denominations. Later the responsibility was taken by the federal government which, in turn, delegated major portions of it to three state public school systems. Initially, the main interest of Western Education was to “Christianize and civilize” Navajo people. By its very nature, this intent was an imposed change agent. Thus, Western education, by its design, replaces Navajo culture with alien values, beliefs, language and morals from the larger society. In doing so, Western education offers little compatibility or relevance with Navajo teachings. It can legitimately be argued that Western education (as we know it today) has created, and continuously contributes to the adverse conditions currently experienced by the Navajo people. For some parents, this condition has generated an unwillingness to immerse their children into Western Education.*

*Historically, Western education has been in conflict with Navajo teachings. Often, its goals and practices violate these teachings. An important factor of this situation is the apparent rejection of Navajo culture and its teachings as a source of legitimate knowledge. This persistent denial has excluded the main basis for educational relevancy to Navajo students. Astute educators know that relevancy brings meaning and motivation to any educational endeavor. Without relevancy – education, teaching and learning becomes a passively rote exercise.”*

**--Dr. Dean C. Jackson, Diné Educational Leader**

# Reconciliation of Knowledge & Wisdom: Helps address the Symptoms & Social Ills through Research Based Systemic Reforms for Ownership



- Increase student attendance;
- Improve student performance and Achievement;
- Increase graduation rates; and
- Reduce Dropout and Suspension Rates



"IF WE BELIEVE **EDUCATION** IS THE FOUNDATION FOR TRUE **SOVEREIGNTY** AS INDIGENOUS NATIONS, I ASK YOU AS KEY STAKEHOLDERS, WHY ARE WE NOT REFORMING OUR SCHOOLS TO ALIGN WITH THAT WONDERFUL VISION OF OWNERSHIP?" -DR. DEBORAH J. DENNISON



**INDIGENOUS  
INGENUITY**  
RESEARCH BASED EDUCATION REFORM MODELS

# Connecting Research Based School Reform Models to Indigenous Philosophy of Life Long Learning

Year after year, we continue to provide education using the same practices and approaches as mainstream society and continue to hope for better results for our Indigenous Children...

Our Resilient History: Confronting Our Past, Understanding Our Present and Preparing for Our Children's Future - A Presentation on the historical events that impact our Here and Now of Navajo Education

## *A Need for Change in Navajo Education...A Broad Look at the Adverse Conditions Effecting the Navajo and Other Indigenous Nations...*

The poverty rate among AI/ANs in 2009 was 23.6% (2009 census), and 32.4% of the under-18 AI/AN population lives in poverty (NCAI Policy Research Center).

Alcoholism mortality rates are 514 percent higher than the general population.

Suicide rates are more than double, and Native teens experience the highest rate of suicide of any population group in the United States.

Diabetes incidence is 177 percent higher, with the highest rate of type 2 diabetes of any specific population in the U.S.

Tuberculosis incidence is 500 percent higher.

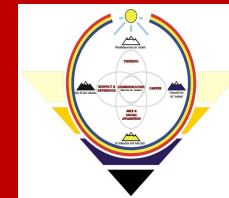
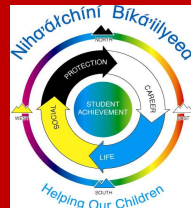
The national graduation rate for American Indian high school students was 49.3 percent for the 2003-4 school year, compared with 76.2 percent for white students.

Just 13.3 percent of Native Americans have undergraduate degrees, versus 24.4 percent of the general population (NIEA).



# Sharing Our Story: A Journey for Quality Indigenous Education

A Closer Look at Research & Correlating Indigenous Ingenuity for Models that Bring Ownership...



Ownership,  
NOT Buy-in.

# Connecting Research Based School Reform Models to the Indigenous Philosophies of Life Long Learning



Implementing innovative extracurricular programs and the integration of culture, language & history of the San Carlos Apache people.



## Chapter V Stakeholder Perceptions of Effectiveness in Navajo Nation Public High Schools & Student Achievement



SCHS Graphic Design Students: Maria Garibay, Lorena Cosen, Kaden Phillips, & Jeremiah Ailak Present the new SCUSD Research Based Brand they developed to Kathy Hoffman, State Superintendent

The results further found six of the eleven demographic variables to have some affect on stakeholder perceptions, primarily on the four clusters related to Organizational Effectiveness. Specifically the demographic variables under “experience,” “overall experience in current school,” “ethnicity,” “level of understanding of Navajo language,” “level of agreement with Navajo language and culture in the school system’s curriculum,” and “length of time residing on the Navajo Nation,” were found to be significantly related to one or more of the Organizational Effectiveness clusters.

The demographic, “level of agreement with Navajo language and culture in the school systems curriculum,” was the only demographic found to have an affect on perceptions related to an Instructional Effectiveness cluster - the Instructional Design cluster.

No relationships were found between the perceptions measured with the Survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness and student achievement.

# Connecting Research Based School Reform Models to the Indigenous Philosophies of Life Long Learning

## Shił Gozhóó – Our Systemic Approach to Being Trauma Informed “*The Brave Way!*”



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

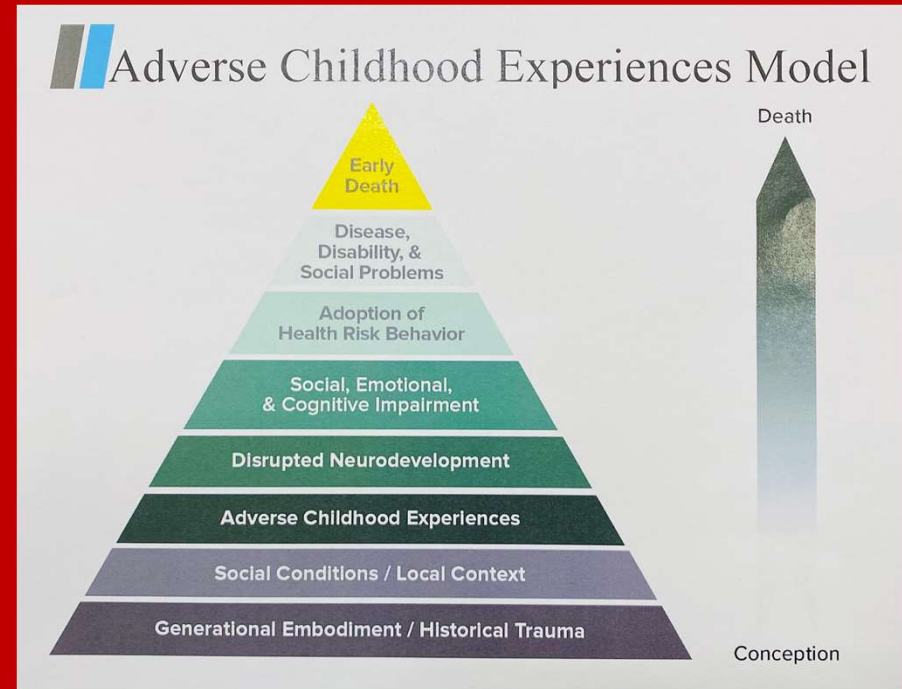


**Shił Gozhóó = “I AM WELL GROUNDED and SELF-ACTUALIZED!”**

Displaying Shil Gozhoo Final 2020.png.

# The Urgency is Now to Connect Research Based School Reforms to the Indigenous Philosophies of Life Long

[IMG\\_1424.mov](#) Learning



# Connecting Research Based School Reform Models to the Indigenous Philosophies of Life Long Learning

National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE)  
Annual Report to Congress

[https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/01/NACIEAnnualReport\\_20211222-508.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/01/NACIEAnnualReport_20211222-508.pdf)

