

Commission on Native Children
Rose Graham presentation
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What is working for Navajo youth:

- Ensure this opportunity to pursue higher education beyond high school, whether it's college or vocational training. An example of this is dual credit programs. Through such programs, students are exposed to college level work, creates a real pathway to college, and students develop as sense of confidence that they can do college level work.
- In addition, I believe what works for Navajo youth is knowing who they are as Native individuals. Research has proven time and again that providing an education rooted in language and culture is important to student success, good citizenship, and social responsibility.
- There is a renaissance in the creative arts and activism across the board. And this is being led by Navajo people who as young people were given opportunities and resources to succeed.
- Let me elaborate on the renaissance of creative arts and activism. For instance, the major streaming services like Netflix and the Cherokee Nation have developed native writing and producer programs. Navajo writer and filmmaker Brian Young went through the program and is now adapting his book into an animation movie for Netflix.
- Likewise, there are long standing organizations like UNITY that offer pathways to young Native people to roles of leadership.
- As well, new organizations like the NDN Collective are leading the way in grassroots and national advocacy in numerous areas like the land back movement and climate justice. At the NDN Collective, Jade Begay heads up the Climate Justice Initiative.
- In sum, we need to provide opportunities and pathways for Navajo and Native young people. The opportunities and pathways all tie into ensuring that our Native students have a strong sense of identity and purpose.

2. What is getting in the way of working.

- On a programmatic level, in pursuing higher education and different pathways to a career, financial aid for students is a major hurdle. On the Navajo Nation, we are funding less than half of the students that apply at this time.
- On a social level, we need to provide students resources to navigate the social problems all too common and encourage them to live healthy lives. Like many native communities, the Navajo Nation is plagued with social issues. Organizations like UNITY offer Navajo students an opportunity to explore ideas and take on leadership roles.
- On a capacity and infrastructure level, we need to ensure tribal communities, schools, and governments have access resources like broadband and wireless internet services. There are a number of other issues that can be address such as facilities, school bus routes, teacher shortages, mental health services.

3. What are your recommendations

- As I noted before, we need to provide opportunities and pathways for Navajo young people to pursue careers in all fields.
 - To ensure student success, we need to support native language and culture programs offered by schools and non-profits. It is never too early to begin teaching students to speak their language.
 - Last, ensure there is adequate funding for education from early childhood to higher education. This includes funding to support alternative pathways to careers as not everyone wants or should go to college.
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- **More Navajo youth are recognizing the need for education past high school.**
 - Each year more than 10,000 Navajo students submit applications for Navajo Nation scholarship funding.
 - An increasing number of high school students actively seek qualification for the Chief Manuelito Scholarship by attaining a high GPA, a high ACT score and completing courses in Navajo language and Navajo government.
 - Dual-enrollment initiatives that help Navajo students attain college credits while still in high school.
 - More Navajo students are graduating from high school with enough college credits to attain an associate degree.
 - **Efforts by colleges and universities to create communities for Native American students.**
 - First-generation college students are not able to rely on advice from college-educated parents about navigating college life. They are usually not familiar with the details of college life, academic resources and social expectations.
 - Schools such as Arizona State University, the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University provide support services to all indigenous students to ensure they will successfully progress through their studies.
 - Navajo students benefit from study spaces, computer workstations, academic counseling, cultural presentations and workshops.
 - **Navajo cultural teachings.**
 - Research demonstrates that when Native American students draw on their cultural beliefs, they excel academically and gain a stronger sense of identity that in turn pushes them to be positive and successful members of society.

What is getting in the way of working:

- The lack of counseling/guidance services at the high-school level. Many Navajo students are not provided sufficient information about the process of applying to colleges, financial aid prior to graduation.
- Students often graduate from high school needing additional support to develop writing and critical thinking skills.
- The lack of access to broadband services.

What are your recommendations:

- Building a mandatory introduction to college life or first-year experience element for all prospective students.
- Mandating financial management classes prior to high-school graduation