

The Native Heritage Alternative School 1 Program

**A Proposed Partnership between the
Indian Heritage program and AS-1**

Final – 11/15/2013

Native Heritage AS-1 Proposal

Introduction

Native American students represent one of the most underserved populations in Seattle School District with significantly lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates, higher rates of exclusionary discipline, and higher rates of participation in Special Ed. Services. Native American students experience a substantial achievement gap, with results of state standardized testing 30-40 points lower than their white peers.

Substantial research indicates that culturally responsive education results in higher academic performance and social success for Native American students. In the past, Seattle School District had an Indian Heritage School that was an integral, national model of urban Native education. Located at Wilson Pacific, the school provided comprehensive, culturally competent, Native-centered education for 150 students in grades 6-12, with a 100% graduation rate. However, the withdrawal of district support and resources resulted in the decline of the program, leading to its closure last year with the few remaining students transferred to the Middle College program at Northgate Mall.

Members of the both the Native American community and the Alternative School 1 (AS-1, currently at Pinehurst K-8) community propose the development of a Native centered K-12 pathway. The pathway would be composed of two separate components: a K-8 program combining the successful experiential and community-based pedagogy at AS-1 with a Native American focus; and renewed Indian Heritage High School program.

This program would be cost-neutral and would support compliance with District Policy 0030, Ensuring Educational and Racial Equity.

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Approved by unanimous vote of the AS-1 / Pinehurst Building Leadership Team

Approved by unanimous vote of the AS-1 / Pinehurst Site Council

Endorsed by Urban Native Education Alliance, with the provision that their support is conditional on the signing of a written MOA by SDS to insure authentic Native community engagement and leadership.

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The Native Heritage AS-1 K-8 Program

The K-8 program would involve a collaboration between the AS-1 community, the Indian Heritage program, and Native American community-based organizations to develop an authentic Native-focused curriculum integrated into the experiential, exploratory, project-based social justice curriculum of AS-1. The program would be housed in an interim site in the South Wing of Lincoln (or another suitable interim site with capacity to support the program) from 2014-2016 and then moved to the new elementary and/or middle school buildings to be constructed at Wilson Pacific.

The Native Heritage AS-1 program will:

- Have a strong, authentic focus on Native American experience, worldview, culture, and history;
- Have culturally competent leadership and faculty that support both programs;
- Collaborate with Native community-based organizations on leadership, training, program development, instructional materials, referrals, consultation and hiring;
- Be multicultural, community-based and inclusive of Native and non-native students;
- Utilize experiential, exploratory learning that supports high academic achievement;
- Have comprehensive inclusion of sports, arts, and languages that are culturally relevant to Native and non-native students including but not limited to creative arts, theatre, music, athletics and language (lacrosse, pow-wows, stick games, basketball, Luchootseed, traditional song and dance and contemporary visual and media expression);
- Include the recommended tribal sovereignty curriculum;
- Maintain the social justice curriculum of AS-1 with additional focus on social justice issues affecting Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples;
- Involve Native community-based organizations, institutions, and agencies to enhance services and support for students;
- Continue the Rites of Passage (AS-1 program) for 8th graders;
- Utilize multi-age classrooms where appropriate;

We ask Seattle Public Schools to move AS-1 (currently at Pinehurst) to Lincoln as an interim site for the school years of 2014-15 and 2015-16 for the purpose of fully developing the mission, structure and curriculum of this partnered program. We call on SPS staff to commit themselves with a written MOA to ensure authentic shared decision making with Native community based organizations and Native community participation in developing the proposed programs.

We also ask that the district honor promises made to the Native American Community to rename the new Wilson-Pacific school after Robert Eaglestaff.

This proposal supports the District Policy 0030, Ensuring Educational and Racial Equity, by ensuring an equitable distribution of resources and funding are utilized to address the achievement gap, reduce disproportionality in disciplinary action, improve graduation rates, and raise the academic performance of SPS Native learners.

Background and Rationale

The Need:

Native American students are among the most underserved students in the Seattle School District, with significantly lower graduation rates, higher drop-out rates, and higher rates of exclusionary discipline than the district average. Native American students also have a very high percentage that qualify for free and reduced lunch, and one of the highest rates of Special Ed. status in the district.

Data on the total number of Native American students in the Seattle Public Schools is complex. There are 504 students who were identified as Native American ethnicity in 2012-2013. However, that figure excludes many students who are multi-racial but still identify culturally as Native American, as well as Native American students who also identify as Hispanic. More than 2922 students identified Native American as a primary racial identity. Of these, 150 are Alaskan Natives and 61 are from Washington Tribes, while the vast majority of 2,711 are from tribes outside of Washington. However, the tribal breakdown may not accurately capture students who have multiple tribal affiliations.

Graduation rates among Native American students have historically been the lowest of any ethnic group, though that has improved in 2012. In the classes of 2009 – 2011, graduation rates for Native American students ranged from 54% - 51%, increasing to 63% in the class of 2012. This compares to a district overall average of 74-77% and an average for white students of 85% - 87%. According to OSPI data, the annual drop-out rate for Native American students is 8.8%, double that of white students.

73.4 % of Native American students qualified for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program, as compared to 12.2% of white students and 40.1% of the district overall. 29.9% of Native American students receive Special Ed services, the highest percentage of any ethnic group, compared to 14.6% of the district overall. Only 3.2% of Native American students are enrolled in advanced learning programs (APP or Spectrum), compared to 13.1% of white student and 8.5% of the district overall.

The achievement gap for Native American students is also severe. In 2013, 53.3% of Native American students met state achievement standards in reading, compared to 88.9% of white students and 76.5% of the district overall. Only 46.3% met state math standards, as compared to 84.1% of white students and 71.8% of the district overall (OSPI Data). The 2013 Seattle School District Scorecard shows Native American students as the only group to have shown a decline in state test scores.

Native American students are three times more likely to experience exclusionary discipline (suspension and expulsion) than other students.

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Significant research into Native American education indicates that culturally responsive curriculum can dramatically improve Native American student achievement. Culturally responsive curriculum:

- Recognizes and uses Native languages
- Understands and respects Native culture and experience.
- Connects classroom teaching with student experience.
- Respects Native spirituality.
- Creates meaningful engagement between the school and community.

Additionally, research indicates that Native American student performance improves when a collaborative or cooperative approach is used which increases student engagement, and when an experiential model is used as opposed to more traditional classroom models.

Alternative School 1:

Alternative School 1 (AS-1) was formed in 1969 by a group of teachers and parents who wanted to create an alternative, student directed educational model within the Seattle School District. It has evolved and moved several times over the years, but has been located in the Pinehurst K-8 location since 1984.

AS-1 utilizes a holistic, multi-cultural, experiential, project-based, social-justice curriculum that is unique in the Seattle School district. It emphasizes hands-on experiential education and connects classroom teaching with community engagement. Much of AS1 education takes place in the form of large, interdisciplinary projects where students can choose to explore research topics relevant to their lives and interests.

AS-1 serves a diverse population that includes students who are particularly vulnerable and not well served in other schools. Approximately 55% of AS-1 students qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program and 16% are on IEPs for Special Ed services. Many AS-1 students have learning difficulties or non-traditional learning styles that either slipped through the cracks at other schools or experienced bullying and social stigma. Because of AS-1s social justice commitment and community engagement, highly at-risk students who have experienced severe trauma, social isolation, and behavioral challenges are supported in an inclusive classroom setting.

AS-1 is able to meet the needs of these students is because of an inclusive environment where students of varying abilities and backgrounds, including highly capable students who qualify for APP or Spectrum, work side-by-side in a collaborative learning community. Because of the project-based approach at AS-1 and the faculty's extensive experience with differentiated instruction, students are able to work independently at differing levels of ability, supporting each other across differences. As one AS-1 father put it:

“[AS-1] is a place where my gifted son and my learning disabled daughter can be taught by the same teachers in the same classrooms, and both are challenged and supported.”

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While AS-1 does not currently have a Native primary focus, it has historically had strong connections to the Native community. Official district and OSPI data reports that Native Americans make up 3% of the student body at AS-1, one of the highest percentages in the district. As recently as three years ago, 7% of the student body was Native American. However those statistics understate the true number of Native American students at the school because of limitations of reporting. The AS1 counselor has identified 17 students, or 11% of the student body, who are Native. Pinehurst has participated in numerous collaborations with Native American community groups and attempts to bring in Native perspectives wherever possible. For example, when the 3rd/4th grade class raised Coho salmon eggs as part of their science curriculum, they also learned about the role of salmon in the local Native culture, including a traditional blessing at the release of the salmon fry by Yakima Nation member Glen Pinkham.

From 2003 – 2004, AS-1 students collaborated with Tlingit artist in residence, Saaduuts Peele to carve a traditional northwest canoe on the AS1 grounds. The 40' cedar log was carved by students, members of the AS-1 community and members of the local Native community and then finished in an all-day steaming ceremony on the school grounds. The canoe was then gifted by AS 1 students, staff, and members of the Seattle Native American community at a potlatch in Hydaburg, Alaska on April 4, 2004.

Indian Heritage School

American Indian Heritage School has been in the Wilson Pacific Building since 1974. Under the leadership Robert Eaglestaff it was a thriving 6-12 school that maintained a 100% graduation rate for its Students. At the 20th anniversary of the school in 1994, not only did 100% of the students graduate, but every graduate in the prior two years had enrolled in college. The success of the school was due to the support services provided to students, culturally relevant curricula, culturally responsive services, quality Instruction delivery, and community engagement. It received substantial support from Seattle School District and Huchosedah Indian Education program.

After Robert Eaglestaff died suddenly in 1996, leadership and support from Seattle Public Schools began over time to deteriorate. Enrollment dropped and in 2000 the program was merged with the Middle College High School, an alternative high school for students at high risk of failing to graduate. This eliminated the middle-school component of the school and diluted the Native focus. In 2010, district failure to meet a federal deadline resulted in the loss of funding for two Native American faculty, further eroding the program. In 2012-2013 the remaining students in the program were moved to the Middle-College program at Northgate Mall. While the Middle College Program provides a critical service to high-needs students, it is not primarily a Native-focused program and only serves a small handful of the thousands of Native students in the district.

This proposal would insure the revival of the Indian Heritage program as a full K-12 pathway that would provide a Native-centered program open to both Native and non-native students. It would draw on the experience of the AS-1 faculty in providing a diverse, multi-cultural experiential learning environment, combined with leadership from the Native community to create an authentic Native centered K-8 program. The collaboration would avoid the need to create a Native heritage K-8 program from the ground up, while insuring authentic Native leadership.

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This proposal also seeks to insure that the program is an authentic program centered on Native American experience, worldview, culture, arts, music, and history. The proposal does not want to replicate examples of poorly designed programs that have been marred by tokenism, lack of authentic engagement with the native community, or cultural appropriation.

Cost

Due to the current low enrollment of 156 students, AS-1 at Pinehurst has a cost per student of approximately \$6500, somewhat higher than the average for K-8 schools. The higher cost is largely due to the cost of maintaining a full administrative overhead for a school of 156 students.

The proposed Native Heritage AS-1 program would be co-located at an interim site at Lincoln and then at the new building at Wilson Pacific. Because it would share administrative costs with the larger school, the per-student costs would be significantly less than the current AS-1 at Pinehurst. Additionally the Native focus combined with added stability and support for the program would be expected to grow enrollment. With an enrollment of 200, costs could be brought down below \$5,500 per student.

The Indian Heritage High School Program would be formed as a program within Ingraham High, in partnership with Native community groups. Since it would exist within the larger high school, the cost of the program would not be significantly more than for other programs.

However, sufficient resources would be required to insure the success of the both portions of the program. SPS Policy No 0030 acknowledges the importance of “differentiating resource allocation, within budgetary limitations, to meet the needs of students who need more supports and opportunities to succeed academically.” The program would expect appropriate support in the fulfillment of that objective.

Both the AS-1 program and local Native organizations are extremely successful at bringing in grants and free services to students. AS-1 has developed partnerships with many organizations to provide free field trips, guest lecturers and expanded educational opportunities at no additional cost to the district, including King County Arts Commission, Cedar River Watershed, Washington State Holocaust Education Center, the Burke Museum, the Center for Wooden Boats, Pacific Northwest Ballet, and many others. Creation of an authentic Native Heritage AS1 program with adequate support from the Seattle School District would be able to partner with Native Youth groups such as the Clear Sky after-school program to provide additional support and services to Native students.

Appendix I – Examples of how AS-1 Supports Vulnerable Students

Note – all names have been changed to protect the identity of the students.

A is a 10-year old boy who was removed from the custody of his biological mother at age 6. He was neglected while in the care of his biological mother and maternal grandmother and was bullied incessantly. At 6 years of age, he did not know his ABCs or 123s. He had experienced such trauma during his young years that certain noises or tones would cause him to either shut down or act out. He is still to this day very sensitive when he perceives that he has been disregarded or mistakenly blamed.

A has been enrolled at AS-1 at Pinehurst since he was 6 years old. He has an IEP for speech and other Special Ed services for learning disabilities. The staff at Pinehurst have worked continuously to assist his academic and social growth. He is now at grade level in reading. He has built strong positive relationships at Pinehurst. The role models and lifelong friends he has gained at Pinehurst have allowed my son to start the healing process and learn to trust again.

At age 9, O witnessed the slaughter of his family in the Somali civil war. O fled to a refugee camp in Kenya where he lived until he landed at Seattle at age 12. In Seattle, O's untreated PTSD resulted in his expulsion from two SPS Middle Schools. When he was assigned to AS-1 at Pinehurst, O refused to attend class or speak to adults. He spoke to other students only to threaten them. Without a Family Support Worker or ELL program, faculty and staff located outside resources for O. We found help at the YMCA, which has a small program for Horn of Africa refugees. Staff also enlisted the aid of a local community activist, who became O's mentor. With the mentors help, O discovered basketball and joined the Pinehurst team, where he enjoyed his first real success in school. Thanks to ongoing counseling at a local mental health agency, O began attending school regularly and productively. AS-1 engaged a local tutoring company that does occasional pro bono work and offered him free, twice-weekly sessions to close the gaps in his education. With all those community resources in place, O began to thrive. Today he is a successful sophomore in high school, an upstanding citizen, and a frequent visitor and guest lecturer in MS Humanities at AS-1 at Pinehurst.

B was a foster child who was being bullied about her Native American heritage at another school. The situation was so bad that when the school featured a "Culture Day" she wore a kimono and represented herself as Japanese because she was ashamed of her Native heritage. Her parents looked into AS-1 at Pinehurst, and were impressed by the school's commitment to diversity and equity which went far beyond any other school they had visited and "was woven into every part of curriculum and daily life," they commented. B immediately grew in self-esteem and confidence when she started at Pinehurst and was able to connect with other Native American students. At AS-1 at Pinehurst she speaks proudly of her Native American heritage, and through the flexible curriculum she is researching a Native American artist as a major project this semester.

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R was assigned to AS-1 at Pinehurst after he was expelled from middle-school for fighting. He was a 14 year-old seventh grader (repeating grade 7). While his basic academic skills were only a year under grade-level, he was dealing with the juvenile justice system because he'd been caught shoplifting on two occasions. Faculty worked with his mom and a guardian *ad litem* to help R navigate the legal system, complete his community service, and avoid juvenile detention. In addition they were able to procure services for both R and his mom through a local mental health agency.

R has a long way to go in order to overcome his impulse to shoplift and fight, but AS-1 at Pinehurst has offered him stability and support for the past 15 months. The halftime counselor and the rest of the staff work to help R deal with potentially violent situations, and so far have been able to help him steer clear of the fights and expulsions that lead to unsupervised time and illegal activities. Because R is a gifted performer, we've helped him win arts scholarships that ensure his life away from school is productive. He is also provided with Title 1 services to encourage academic achievement, and his teachers meet with him and his mom once a week, after school, to help him manage homework and non-school time.

All of these interventions are necessary because if we do not help R now, his history suggests that dropping-out and incarceration lay in wait. Obviously R is a work-in-progress and there are no guarantees with regard to his future, but faculty believe that the time and effort spent now are critical in helping R achieve the happiness and success he desires and deserves.

S is a fifth-grader with an extensive history of abuse and resulting behavioral issues. He was removed from his home and placed in foster care in the fall of his first grade year. Despite behavioral problems that resulted in his exclusion from most of the school day, he was never put on an IEP and never received Special Ed services. His foster parents put him in a private school while they tried to work with the district to develop an IEP which he did not receive until December of his first grade year. At that time he began attending a behavior Special Ed program in the Seattle public schools, where he was frightened by the behavior of other children and unsuccessful. In second grade he was transferred to a behavior program at yet another Seattle public school, which was also unsuccessful. By spring of second grade his condition had deteriorated to the point that he was admitted to Western State Hospital for a long-term psychiatric hospitalization. While there he attended the hospital school, a locked facility run by the local school district. When he got out of the hospital at the end of third grade, his foster parents visited AS-1 at Pinehurst, and were very excited about the small, kinesthetic, experiential nature of the program, combined with an academic rigor that they felt would be very appropriate for S since his IQ is very high.

S started fourth grade in a behavioral Special Ed program at Pinehurst. S loved the school and was beginning to become successful for the first time in his life. When the behavioral Special Ed program was moved to another school after just one year, S and his foster parents talked to staff at Pinehurst and came up with a plan to keep J at Pinehurst even though he would have to move to a general education classroom. S not only was able to function in the general education classroom but began to do better than he ever had before. He found excellent peer models among his 29 classmates, and his teacher worked closely with S, his family, and the special education teacher to come up with a plan that worked. S has benefited from Pinehurst's daily physical education, extra recess, frequent field trips, outdoor learning, flexibility to be with younger children when he needs a break, time in the garden, and many

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other unique opportunities. He is also a child who likes to express himself in a gender-unique way. Both he and his family have reported that he has never been teased or commented on when he has come to school with nail polish or girls accessories. S's parents are so happy that Pinehurst, his seventh school, has been so successful for him, and they believe he may have the opportunity to be a successful middle school student if he can stay there through eighth grade.

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