



Fostering Whole Child Health and Wellness: Engaging Families, Communities, and Early Childhood Educators

Mission Statement

The educational philosophy of Northwest Indian College is based upon the belief that the opportunity for post-secondary education must be provided within Native American communities. Northwest Indian College is committed to the belief that “self-awareness” is the foundation necessary to:

1. Achieve confidence, esteem, and a true sense of identity;
2. Build a career; create a “self-sufficient” life-style; and
3. Promote life-long learning.

We are also committed to the belief that “Through education, Northwest Indian College promotes Indigenous self-determination and knowledge.” This mission helps to guide our work in the Restorative Teachings ECE Initiative.

Collaborating with Communities

The following conversations with parents and families, elders, community members, tribal leaders, and early childhood educators provide us with the guidance and input necessary, in order to build on a tribal community’s strengths, in an effort to support and enhance whole child health and wellness.

They also serve as stepping stones toward our overall goal of strengthening systems of care and learning for Native children and families. That is because, in order to implement initiatives in tribal communities, the work must be done **with** tribal communities.

We need to not only take into consideration, but be guided by, what tribal communities want and desire, and their strengths and needs, in order to ensure that children thrive, and that our work is truly promoting not only quality, sustainability, and equity, but equally important, sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization as well.

Community Visioning

We use Guiding Questions to help focus the Visioning:

1. What is the ideal thriving, healthy Lummi young child?
2. What are your hopes for young Lummi children?
3. How do Native parents advocate for better education for their children?



Participants’ vision for whole child health and wellness includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Intergenerational participation
- Developmentally appropriate practices
- Respect for Coast Salish way of life
- Traditional teachings
- Restoration, reclamation, and revitalization of Lummi language

This vision, expressed during the Community Visioning, helps to inform our conception of “Whole Child Health and Wellness” and “Securing Families.”



Family Engagement

We ask parents and families to provide us with Visionary Statements describing the Image of a Healthy Lummi Child, and families responded with the following:

- We are thinking of our children’s future and relating our Indigenous culture with our children’s learning.
- Children will be able to identify “home” with traditional plants and foods.
- This is an awesome project because it gives rise to learning about [our] identity. Children won’t feel lost; they’ll feel connected to their home through traditional plants and foods.
- [Learning about traditional Coast Salish plants and foods,] it’s important because my child will learn traditional practices of certain types of foods. Learning who we are and where we come from as Indigenous people.
- Mental health - traditional, native plants allow kids to engage with the natural world, figure out how things are connected to each other, and how we rely on our environment, all through experiential learning. [They will develop] feelings of connectedness with all worldly creatures.
- Physical health - many traditional foods and plants are highly nutritious and sustainable, thus being a great food source for children.
- [An outdoor classroom] will help the children identify “home.” They will have teachings about traditional plants and foods... Identity / Pride / Whole / Balance
- [This project] will promote community engagement.
- I love that the [Initiative is] connected to the [Lummi Community ECE Visioning] that happened in 2012. The knowledge that we are moving forward with Restorative Teachings and building on what we started is great.



Professional Development

We also seek input and guidance from our Early Childhood Educators. We want to ensure there is shared leadership and a shared responsibility with teachers in this initiative. Therefore, we assess teacher’s wants, desires, strengths and needs by facilitating a KWL chart activity.



Not only does this process help to inform our overall project and our next steps with teacher professional development, but it also gives teachers the opportunity to engage in collective inquiry.

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