



2019

Ambassador between Two Nations: Response 3

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Title: Ambassador Between Two Nations
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Response to Questions

1. How can the school counselor provide relevant and pertinent information in which a structure can be established which promotes respect and responsibility on both sides?

Starting with Michelle, it is imperative that the school counselor understand that each and every student and family is unique. In each situation, the counselor should invite the student and family to share their particular challenges while also emphasizing the strengths and assets of their family members, structure, and cultural worldview. This approach creates an environment that promotes sharing and collaboration among all parties. Time must be devoted to developing rapport before moving to the often challenging ‘work’ portion of a meeting. Perhaps Michelle and her family could be asked about their hopes for Michelle’s life. Where do they envision her in 5 or 10 years? Is high school and/or college graduation a part of that dream? If so, those are dreams for the school staff to build upon, and the importance of middle school education can be emphasized in that equation. In short, Michelle’s family must be made to feel like a valued member of the discussion. They should be invited to share as often as possible, offer solutions during the brainstorming portion of the meeting, and be considered partners in confronting this challenge, rather than adversaries who have broken the law and need to be threatened. Relevant laws and school policies must be explained, but the counselor should do so only after rapport has been established and the family has had ample opportunity to share and ask questions.

2. What steps can be taken to locate and compile resources to help the district and the family to accommodate the cultural values of the family, the demands of the school policy and needs of Michelle?

The counselor’s first step should likely be to connect with elders and respected leaders within the tribal community. As mentioned above, an issue like this will require the cooperation of concerned and culturally sensitive individuals from both the tribe and school who have taken the time to build rapport and trust, and to discuss the challenges in an open and honest manner. The school should take an emic

approach by inviting the Native population to share about their culture, including challenges faced by their population (particularly school-age youth); the strengths and assets of their community; possible solutions they envision to this particular problem; opinions of the school; hopes for the future; etc. The school needs to speak honestly about their concerns (particularly as it relates to attendance and dropout rate), explain the law and school policy, and offer resources and ideas to tackle the issues. Both parties might reach out to other schools and Native populations in neighboring communities or states to discuss these issues, share solutions and resources, and/or form larger working groups to tackle systemic challenges. The counselor might also do a web search or post to a counselor listserv or idea exchange (such as ASCA Scene) for ideas, resources, research, etc.

3. What resources are available to assist with addressing the challenges of school attendance?

Does the tribe have resources; tutoring programs; attendance policies; cultural programs?

In working collaboratively with with the tribe to tackle these issues, the school should inquire as to the availability of tribal resources such as those listed above. If the tribe does not have additional help or programming available for school-aged children, perhaps the school could work with the tribe to establish a presence on the reservation via tutoring, after school programs such as sports or clubs. As the school counselor continues to learn Michelle's story, he may discover that she could benefit from truancy programs and supports that are offered at the school. For example, it may be possible that Michelle could benefit from a friendship or social support group that the school counselor offers on a regular basis. In the event that Michelle suffers from anxiety related to her school attendance, the counselor could also provide individual counseling to help build coping strategies for Michelle to help alleviate her anxiety.

4. What resources are not being considered? Could these be considered in fostering an ongoing positive relationship with American Indian children, their parents, their communities and the school in order to improve achievement and success?

In addition to the above, the school might consider evaluating the academic curriculum and the knowledge, awareness, and skill sets of the school community as they relate to serving Native youth and families. According to the 2014 Native Youth Report (Executive Office of the President), one of the root

causes for low Native American academic achievement is the lack of "culturally relevant curriculum and culturally competent staff that understand how to reach Native youth." (??). To rectify this, it is recommended that schools work to incorporate Native American history and languages in the curriculum. To cultivate a more collaborative approach, the school and native community could work together to construct new classes/units, select new textbooks (if applicable) and materials, and provide ongoing professional development to all school employees. A good starting point might be to hold a community forum on or near the reservation in order to gather their opinions on all manner of issues related to education and the local school community.

References & Resources

American School Counselor Association (2016). ASCA Scene homepage. Retrieved from <http://scene.schoolcounselor.org/home>.

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Regional Education Laboratory (2016). Native American Education Research Alliance homepage. Retrieved from <https://www.relcentral.org/research-alliances/ra7-impact-of-research-based-curriculum-and-instruction-strategies-on-the-achievement-of-native-american-students/>

United States Department of the Interior (2016). Bureau of Indian Affairs homepage. Retrieved from <http://www.indianaffairs.gov>.

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Additional Reading

Reid, A. (2014). Native American Identity Formation in Relation to Educational Experiences (Paper 28). *Social Sciences Capstone Projects*. Retrieved from <http://commons.pacificu.edu/cassoc/28>.

The Center for Native American Youth (2011). Center for Native American Youth At the Aspen Institute

Homepage (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.cnay.org/Home.html>

Supplemental Learning Activities

- 1) Invite expert on Native issues to visit class (or Skype) to discuss current issues. Work with the expert on ways students can advocate for that community. Consider making this an assignment.
- 2) Assign groups of students to role-play the meeting with Michelle's family. Possible roles include parents (and other family members), Michelle, principal, school counselors, tribal elders, etc.
- 3) Additional culture specific questions for class discussion (provided by scenario author):
 - What are the differences in values between the American Indian community and the public school community, and are they really that different? Are there Tribal ceremonies and designated events that are in conflict with children attending school?
 - What has been done in the past to address this issue? Have the school community and the Tribal communities made attempts to foster a good working relationship on behalf of the children and their education? And if so what happened, is there anything that can be learned to make progress in this endeavor?
 - What have other school/tribal communities done to successfully build a partnership that allows for this support?
 - What is the historical context with regard to the school/tribe and larger surrounding community for this particular Tribe?
 - Why are the current policies for attendance not being followed or addressed with Indian children?