

**NATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL (IN)EQUITY IN WASHINGTON STATE:
RECLAIMING EDUCATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY**

A report to the Washington Education Association

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¹ Authors are listed in alphabetical order. Rather than traditional Euro-Western paradigms of authorship (e.g., listing authors in order of “contribution” to the writing of this particular text itself), we took a more collaborative approach. Please refer to the methods section for a discussion of authorship in educational research on, by, with, and for Indigenous communities.

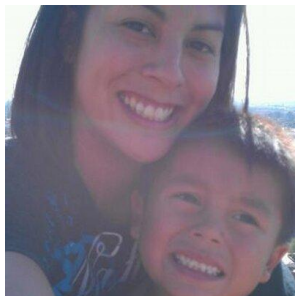
RESEARCHERS' BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES



Dana Arviso is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and lives and works in Seattle, WA on the lands and waters of the Duwamish, Suquamish, and Muckleshoot Tribes. She is a doctoral candidate and staff member at University of Washington College of Education. Her research interests include decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies, the philanthropy sector's relationship to Native communities, and exploring ways to equitably and sustainably fund cultural resurgence and language revitalization efforts in Native and Tribal communities.



Anne Marie Guerrettaz is a K-12 teacher-educator, researcher, and faculty member at Washington State University—located on the homelands of Nez Perce and Palus people. Dr. Guerrettaz specializes in Indigenous language reclamation. She lived in *mayab* (a.k.a., Yucatan, Mexico) throughout 2008-2016 as a learner and researcher of *maaya t'aan* [Yucatec Maya language]. Dr. Guerrettaz is largely of mixed European ancestry (i.e., White), a descendant mostly of colonial settlers and migrants. She was born in Madison, Wisconsin, where diverse Indigenous peoples have lived for approximately 12,500 years, including the Ho-Chunk Nation, the Fox (Meskwaki) and the Sauk. Dr. Guerrettaz has lived most of her life in the region currently known as Indiana, specifically on the homelands of the myaamiaki, Lënape, Bodwéwadmik, Potawatomi, saawanwa, Delaware and Shawnee.



Laina Phillips is a citizen of the Spokane Tribe. Currently is a principal in the Wellpinit School District. Laina graduated from Arizona State University with a B.A. in Elementary Education and with an M.Ed Leadership from Washington State University. Laina serves her community through the Wellpinit School District. Through her work she advocates for the improvement of the public education system for Native American students. Laina is a proud mother and wife.



Melodi Wynne is a citizen of the Spokane Tribe of Indians, lives on her ancestral homelands, works within her Tribal community, and also advocates for Tribal perspectives in neocolonial systems of regional and state policies and practices. Dr. Wynne received her degree in Community and Cultural Psychology along with a graduate certificate in Conflict Resolution from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her research interests include culture and identity, Indigenous research issues and methodologies, Tribal food sovereignty, and curriculum planning across the educational spectrum. Wynne's work within community projects is grounded in community empowerment, healing centered engagement, and decolonizing/indigenizing systems.

ABSTRACT

This research report aims to better understand educational equity in education for, by, and in Native American communities in Washington state. We begin with a literature review that discusses settler-colonialism in education; settler-colonialism offers key insights into any discussion of educational equity concerning Tribes in the area currently known as the United States of America. The rest of the report is empirical in nature. The study data were 9 one-on-one interviews with parents, administrators, educators, and Tribal leaders in Washington (7 Native American, 2 White) with various types of experience relating to Native education and/or the Washington Education Association (WEA). This study responds to four research questions as to whether educational equity currently exists for Tribes, what educational equity means to Tribes, and pathways forward in the quest for equity in Native education. The notion of *educational sovereignty* plays a central role in our findings.

Regarding the first overarching finding from this research, data from across participants indicates that educational equity does not currently exist for Native American students or Tribes in Washington state. This first findings section describes the dynamics of settler-colonialism in education, revealing pervasive conditions and experiences of racism by Native American children, families, communities, and educators in Washington. The second findings section seeks to understand what educational equity means for Native American stakeholders in Washington. Specifically, participants indicate that educational sovereignty is a critical means of conceptualizing and enacting educational equity among Tribes. After identifying the conceptual ties between educational equity and educational sovereignty in the second findings section, the third findings section focuses on impediments to educational equity that currently exist. This also includes a discussion of the supports that need to be bolstered or created in order to attain educational equity. Finally, the fourth and final findings section offers compelling examples of what educational sovereignty can look like for Native students and Tribes in Washington.

INTRODUCTION

In this report, we aim to understand the pathways for educational equity vis-à-vis Native American Tribes in Washington state. In a landmark resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2007, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples set forth an international legal standard for Indigenous peoples' rights to culturally appropriate education. To quote, Article 14 of UNDRIP states that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (United Nations, 2007)

More than the “right” to educate our own children, Indigenous families and Tribes have the ability and desire to be an integral part of the children’s education at all sites of learning. It was from this core responsibility that we as authors of the present report sought to make recommendations to the Washington Education Association (WEA) for how they can further bring equity to the educational justice issues identified by Native students, families, teachers, administrators, Tribes, and communities. While some aspects of this report on educational equity for Tribes may resonate with other nondominant populations (e.g., students of color, immigrant populations, and more) that are studied in another overarching project (WSAC Roadmap on Closing the Opportunity Gap, 2021), many findings in the present report are quite unique to Native American students, families, and communities.

This report begins with a brief overview of Native education in Washington. Next, we present a review of the literature on education equity in Native education, which is followed by an explanation of our research methodology. Then, the bulk of this paper goes on to present findings related to educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes in this region, focusing on major themes that emerged from our data. Implications for educators are included in the final sections. Throughout this report, we aim to center the voices of Native American participants while also attending carefully to the WEA membership demographic, which consists mostly of non-Native Americans. Thus, we aim to reach a broad audience of WEA members and regional educators through our findings and recommendations.

GENERAL BACKGROUND: WHAT IS “NATIVE EDUCATION” IN WASHINGTON STATE?

According to the most recent report on *The State of Native Education*, “Washington’s schools served 61,119 public school students that identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native” for the

academic year 2018-2019 (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2019, p. 3). Approximately 5.4% of the 1,138,980 public school students in Washington identify as Native American or mixed race, as per the federal reporting guidelines (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2019, p. 4). Many students live and attend schools within their own Tribal reservations or communities. Some live and attend schools outside of reservation lands or Tribal communities. In urban populations, many students are there because of relocation and/or termination policies. There is very little adequate data on Native American education: this lack of representation of American Indians and Alaska Natives within national, state, and local data sets is widely known within Indian Country and leads to our invisibility.

Currently, there are 29 federally recognized Tribes and 5 non-federally recognized Tribes in Washington (Washington State Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, 2021). These Tribal cultures vary significantly in terms of lifeways and land bases. Moreover, these Tribes represent several major language families and dialects within those languages, which indicates further differences in cultural practices. Collectively, Washington Tribes are committed to preserving culture and languages, protecting natural resources, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and building and investing in local communities (Washington Tribes, 2021). Quite importantly, the complex histories and different relationships with settler colonial groups are embedded in a) Tribal treaties with the federal government and b) ongoing relations with Washington, state counties, and each Tribe's nearby towns and cities.

The majority of Native students in Washington attend state-controlled public schools, while other Native students attend Tribally-controlled schools—known as State-Tribal Education Compact (STEC) schools. These are the two major systems that currently serve Native American children in Washington. Additionally, a small minority of Native students attend private schools. Some STECs receive funding through the United States Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), though there are no schools in Washington that are operated by the BIE.² There are approximately seven STECs in Washington: Quileute Tribal School, Lummi Nation School, Yakama Nation Tribal School, Muckleshoot Tribal School, Chief Kitsap Academy in Suquamish, Chief Leschi Schools in Puyallup, and Wa He Lut Indian School in Nisqually (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.). Most of these are supported through a combination of Tribal, state, and BIE contract funding. Additionally, at least one other, Paschal Sherman Indian School in Omak, describes itself as “Tribally Controlled” (Bureau of Indian Education, n.d.), though it does not appear in the OSPI website's current list of STECs.

Washington's STECs are uniquely structured and came into existence in 2013 when the Washington Legislature passed House Bill 1154:

The bill authorizes the Superintendent of Public Instruction to enter into state-Tribal education compacts. The legislation exempts schools that are the subjects of state-Tribal education compacts from all existing state statutes and rules regarding school districts and district boards of directors; establishes standards for teachers, staff, and curriculum;

² Federally across the U.S., “there are 183 Bureau-funded elementary and secondary schools; 53 BIE-operated, and 130 tribally controlled under BIE contracts or grants”.

outlines admissions policies and school funding; and establishes reporting requirements on student enrollment. (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's Office of Native Education, 2021)³

The Office of Native Education (ONE), a subsidiary of the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), plays a central role for the state's public schools, coordinating with the districts, Tribes, STECs, Native children's guardians/families, and other relevant individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW: SETTLER-COLONIALISM, EDUCATION, AND EQUITY

The four co-authors were rather surprised to discover that relatively little has been published on the topic of educational equity in Native Education in Washington. Otherwise put, this under-researched topic is not as well understood as we educators might desire or expect. Indeed, much of what we have learned from the literature comes from research on 1) Indigenous education in other lands about different Tribal communities and cultures (i.e., those completely outside Washington state)⁴, or 2) from graduate student theses that have considered educational equity vis-a-vis Tribes in Washington but have not been formally published. These resources nonetheless provide some helpful insights with regard to the aforementioned focus of this report—educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes in Washington.

This literature review is organized into three interrelated parts: an introduction to settler-colonialism, implications of settler-colonialism in education, and educational equity from Native perspectives. Moreover, the notion of educational sovereignty is a common thread throughout. Generally speaking, educational sovereignty refers to Native Americans' right to determine their/our own educational priorities, practices, and more. We begin with the first thematic topic of the literature review, the legacy of settler-colonialism.

Settler-Colonialism

Washington is a settler-colonial government, part of the broader settler-colonial society of the U.S. This is foundational understanding for the current report on Native education since settler-colonialism is a powerful structure and dynamic that permeates all aspects of life in the state, including education. Colloquially, colonialism is sometimes thought of as a period of European imperialism in the past that ended when the imperial political structure of the 'colony' or 'colonies' ended. However, colonialism endures in the United States because "[i]nvasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388), the effects of which have been "domination, displacement, and control" of the original inhabitants (Trask, 1999, p. 25 as cited in Winstead, 2014, p. 26). The U.S. is a *settler*-colonial society—with the emphasis on the term 'settler.' Because the population of European colonists (i.e., settlers) and their descendants

³ For specific information about each Tribally-controlled school and how it is designated and funded, please also see the list of the types of schools on ONE's webpage:

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/native-education/types-tribal-schools>

⁴ As an example of the first type of literature, much of the research on Native American education centers on the region currently known by many as the Southwest of the United States.

remained on these Native lands (i.e., White Euro-Americans today), settler-colonialism (e.g., the U.S.) differs from other types of colonial nations where the colonists did not remain indefinitely.⁵

While it can be psychologically difficult to come to grips with, the reality is that “settler-colonialism destroys [Indigenous lifeworlds in order] to replace” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). Moreover, racism by colonists toward the Indigenous people of the region has been present since the arrival of European settlers, and the dawn of the American Revolution dramatically increased this oppression (DeJong, 1993, p. 111). Meaning, these oft-praise events in much of White American culture — the American Revolution and associated ‘American independence’ — in reality solidified the settler-colonial government while also heightening the persecution of the Indigenous people.

Education has long played a central role in the settler-colonial system of the U.S. vis-à-vis the subjugation of Native people. For example, the earliest European settlers deployed education as a means of converting Native children to the dominant colonial religion — Christianity. With the founding of the U.S., scholars often loosely conceptualize three periods of post-revolutionary America’s settler-colonial educational system: 1) The boarding school era (roughly 1879-1930) aimed to “divorce Indian children from their culture” (DeJong, 1993, p. 111), physically separating them from their families, communities, language, and culture. The government-commissioned *Meriam Report* (1928) aimed to assess the state of Indian education and ultimately identified for the settler-colonial government myriad atrocities of the boarding school system. This led to a shift, namely the 2) post-boarding school era which also involved “cultural discontinuity” between Indigenous children and schooling (1930-1965). Historically, the third post-revolutionary period of Native education is often described as that of 3) self-determination (1965-2005). Among the research reports submitted to the WEA, Nancy Beadie (2021) offers a comprehensive overview of the history of such trauma and inequity in Washington.⁶

While such historical periods provide a general sketch of Indian education, many scholars also acknowledge that aspects of each of these three categorizations actually traverse and transcend time periods. For instance, while “cultural discontinuity” is sometimes described as the second period of settler-colonial education, the reality is that these problems did not end in 1965 but persist in many schools today. As another example of the complexities of these historical categorizations, the third period described as that of “self-determination” did not begin for the first time in 1965. Rather, it is important to recall that Tribes experienced educational self-determination before settler-colonialism. Meaning, since time immemorial, before the arrival of European settlers, educational sovereignty was the norm for Tribes across these lands.

⁵ Different from *settler*-colonialism, in other societies, colonizers' interactions and legacy vis-à-vis the Indigenous populations in question were different. For example, in some places like Egypt, British colonizers did not remain indefinitely as settlers but rather colonized primarily by taking (i.e., robbing) resources from the local land and people.

⁶ Please see [Dr. Nancy Beadie’s report](#), which details more of this state education history.

Settler-colonialism in education is a multi-century phenomenon that has undermined Tribes' educational sovereignty.

Implications of Settler-Colonialism in Education

Settler-colonialism in our region has particular implications for Washington's efforts to support Native American education, particularly with regards to Tribal sovereignty. Tribes in and beyond Washington are sovereign nations, which means that any work by Washington state or Washington state entities to support Native education are by definition, *government-to-government* efforts. Washington state educational policy and practice are part of the colonial system, interacting in complex ways with Tribal governments (Winstead, 2014). In terms of what this means in practice, as a few examples, public school governance in Washington includes the legislature, the OSPI, Special Education, Professional Educator Standards Board, School Directors' Association, regional educational service districts, and local school districts. When any of these macro- or micro-level state organizations work with Tribes, the state organizations are themselves engaged in government-to-government work.

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, the fact that Tribes are sovereign nations means that Native children, families, and communities are categorically different from other minoritized populations in Washington, including others addressed in the broader report for the WEA, of which this paper is part. In settler-colonial societies such as the United States, there is a neoliberal multiculturalist tendency to group minoritized migrant populations together with minoritized Indigenous people. Indeed, while not necessarily the intent, such 'groupings' often problematically overlook the unique and long-standing historical connections that Tribes and Native people in general have with this land (Winstead, 2014). This is part of the colonialist discourse that perpetuates inequities and discrimination against Native children and communities. Tribes should not typically be 'grouped' together under the umbrella category of 'people of color,' neither in research nor in educational practice. As educators, it is important to shift our views away from this dominant colonial discourse that positions Native Americans simply as one among many groups of color. Rather, Native people differ notably from the many other populations that have settled on this land as colonists or minoritized migrants. For instance, other minoritized groups do not involve the aforementioned government-to-government relationships that are central to Native education.

State education policy is imbued with colonial systems, values, and ways of being and acting, which intersect in complex ways with Tribal governance, epistemologies, values, and practices. A prominent example of the types of differences that shape colonial versus Tribal education systems and values relates to conceptualizations of 'student achievement,' an issue that is arguably at the heart of education itself. A great deal of the literature on Native education has for decades focused on deficit-minded problems, such as the much talked about "achievement gap" (Winstead, 2014, p. 9). Examples of the "achievement gap" are often discussed in terms of marked tendencies for demographic differences related to standardized testing scores and graduation rates, whereby White children are presented as having better outcomes on these achievements than Native and other minoritized groups of children.

Importantly, though, the very notion of the “achievement gap” has been critiqued for various reasons in research on Native education. First and foremost, this can be characterized as a “damage-centered” concept and overwhelmingly negative lens through which Native children are too often framed (Tuck, 2009). One major concern with such a damage-centered view is that it takes on a life of its own, such that the discourse around Native children overwhelmingly becomes negative. Another tremendous problem is that the measures and assumptions upon which the “achievement gap” is based are rooted in White American and colonial epistemologies, not Native American worldviews or cultures.

Over the past decade and a half, Native scholars and other experts in Native education have proposed “a broader definition of success and accomplishment” vis-à-vis the achievement of Native American children in Washington (Winstead, 2014, p. 10). Much of this centers around positive *student experiences* and *culturally sustaining* curricula:

Indian education dates back to a [pre-colonial] time when all children were identified as gifted and talented. Each child had his skill and ability that would contribute to the health and vitality of the community. Everyone in the community was expected and trained to be a teacher to identify and cultivate the skills and abilities. The Elders were entrusted to oversee the sacred act of knowledge being shared. That is our vision for Indian education today. (Pavel et al., 2008, p. 11)

Indeed, ‘student experience’ is a particularly useful concept and critical concern, particularly in light of the traumatic experiences of discrimination and cultural erasure that many Native students face, and have long faced, in education. Fostering positive and culturally sustaining experiences for Native students is arguably the most important thing that educators and others involved with education do, in caring for students as human beings, learners, community members, and more. Pavel et al. (2008) go on to explain that what many legislators and leaders do not grasp is that Euro-Western measures of student achievement which are often the focus of schooling (e.g., standardized tests, graduation rates, college entry rates) while important, are “not really the point” (p. 12). Rather, supporting students in being and feeling successful is the ultimate goal.

This is not to say that Native American communities and families disregard such issues. Indeed, many want their children to succeed at standardized tests, graduate from high school, and go on to college and/or have meaningful, fruitful vocations - as described in a series of reports from Education Northwest (2018). The point that these scholars make is that education comprises more than these colonial measures of ‘achievement’ suggest. In Native American education, a different, culturally sustaining, and more holistic approach by educators is absolutely necessary (Lee & McCarty, 2017). We as educators must be critically aware—and wary—of the colonial dynamics at work behind the types of ‘achievements’ that are currently at the center of education in the U.S., Washington, and Native education in this region.

Pavel et al. (2008) explain that education experiences rooted in Tribal sovereignty, language, culture, and history are those that are most likely to enable Native students to be and feel

successful. Other scholars similarly highlight educational sovereignty as the bedrock of a more appropriate, culturally sustaining, and just form of Native education than those educational systems and practices that unfortunately prevail today (e.g., Anthony-Stevens *et al.*, 2017; Lee & McCarty, 2017). Understanding education with these types of Native perspectives in mind is an important first step towards unpacking the research questions that guide this study on educational inequity, educational equity, and educational sovereignty in, for, and by Tribes in and around Washington. The next section of the literature review speaks to two topics at the heart of this report—educational equity and educational sovereignty.

Educational Equity from Native Perspectives

Quoting a Hopi Elder and anthropologist, Emory Sekaquaptewa, Sheilah Nicholas explains that the Western concept of social justice is “too broad, all encompassing” and perhaps for these reasons “potentially unachievable” (Anthony-Stevens *et al.*, 2017, p. 26). We interpret this to mean that educational equity is not a static universal concept. Rather, the meaning of this concept varies across socio-cultural groups. We focus the section of our literature review on what educational equity means and looks like for Tribes.

In a doctoral dissertation on the Indigenization of Washington state’s K-12 curriculum, Warner (2012) posits that the “Four Rs” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) are critical points of departure for teachers who aim to advance educational equity. The Four R’s are Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility, summarized as follows (Thorne, 2019):

- “*Respect* for First Nations⁷ cultural integrity” (para. 7).
- *Relevance*: “Provide education that is relevant to First Nations Perspectives and Experience” (Thorne, 2019, para. 7). Meaning, ensure that the curriculum, teaching, assessment, and more are actually what Tribes want and need, rather than being ‘imported’ from dominant Euro-American culture (e.g., colonial White culture).
- *Reciprocity*: “Foster reciprocal relationships” with Tribes, meaning relationships that are mutually beneficial. Non-Native partners in such relationships must focus on serving the interests of the Tribe(s) in question (Thorne, 2019, para. 7). This rebuffs the colonial legacy by which members of the dominant group simply take from Tribes without giving in meaningful ways.
- “Demonstrate *responsibility* through participation” (Thorne, 2019, para.

7). Teachers and schools who operate within the Four Rs can contribute to “decolonizing educational spaces” in Washington (Winstead, 2014, p. 3).

Another interpretation of educational equity, First Nations scholar, Warner (2012), discusses the Indigenization of the K-12 curriculum in Washington:

Recovering and maintaining Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, and ways of knowing and applying these teachings in a contemporary context represents *a web of liberation*

⁷ The term “First Nations” is commonly used in some countries like Canada to refer to people that might also be described or identify as Native, Indigenous, or Aboriginal in some cases. Meaning, First Nations, Native, Indigenous, and Aboriginal are sometimes used interchangeably, though we recognize and honor differences among these terms in local contexts.

strategies Indigenous Peoples can employ to disentangle themselves from the oppressive control of colonizing...governments. Combined with the political drive toward *self-determination*, the strategies mark *resistance to cultural genocide*, vitalizing agenda to rebuild strong and sustainable Indigenous national territories, and promote a just relationship with neighboring states based on the notions of peace and just coexistence embodied in Indigenous knowledge encoded in the original treaties. (Simpson, 2004, p. 373, emphases added)

This quote illustrates the multifarious nature of educational equity in Native education as a “web of liberation strategies” by self-determined nations and speaks to the critical role of sovereignty in educational equity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Taking into account the dynamics of settler-colonialism, its implications for education, and these understandings of educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes in Washington state, we pose the following research questions:

- 1) What *core educational inequities* do Native American students in Washington face?
- 2) What does *educational equity mean in Native American contexts* in Washington?
- 3) What types of *policy changes and other improvements* need to be made in order to support pathways of *educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes*? Namely:
 - a. What are specific examples of *systemic barriers* that currently impede educational equity? And,
 - b. What types of *supports* for educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes *need to be bolstered*?
- 4) What can *educational sovereignty look like in practice*?

METHODS

Data Collection

We undertook this research study during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, all of the interviews occurred virtually using the Zoom video conferencing platform or through written responses exchanged electronically. Each member of the research team interviewed at least one participant, and we interviewed a total of nine participants that represented a wide range of perspectives (Table 1). Interviews were semi-guided and nearly all of the same questions and protocol guided all interviewees. Differences in participants’ positionalities were also taken into account in creating interview questions, which led to some different questions across participants. (e.g., Members of Tribes were asked about aspects of their educational experiences as Tribal members while White participants were not asked multiple nor in-depth questions about such topics that they were not familiar with.) We relied on our existing relationships and positionalities to determine who was best positioned to interview each participant.

Analysis

We individually coded data (e.g., labeling and organizing bits of data around reoccurring or noteworthy concepts, findings, etc.). Throughout multiple coding stages, salient themes were identified across multiple participants based on their lived experiences and stories that they shared with us. We then worked together to identify themes across the entire data set through a series of conversations, analytic memos, and drafts of the research report.

One imperative of our research was protecting participants and the Tribes that they belonged to or served. We followed both University of Washington and Washington State University (WSU) IRB guidelines and obtained both sets of IRB permissions. Additionally, we consulted closely with WSU's Center for Native American Research and Collaboration (CNRC) to ensure our full compliance with protocols and policies developed previously through university partnerships with Washington Tribes. Among other things, this meant that we assigned participants pseudonyms and removed other identifiable information from the data about specific Tribes and individuals.

Indigenous Authorship: Positionalities and Teamwork

The author bios presented at the beginning of this report offer insights into the general positionalities of the researchers. Importantly, three of the four authors of this report identify as Indigenous scholars and/or teachers. Thus, this work represents a departure from the highly problematic tendency that has been a source of consternation in much scholarship on Native education—whereby predominately White scholars write *about* Native children, communities, teachers, and families (see Guerrettaz, Chan Dzul & Cahum, 2020). Moreover, in the spirit of research that increasingly guides publishing ethics in Native American inquiry, we approached authorship in a highly collaborative way. Meaning, various contributions to this project merited authorship, including for example the writing of the report, participation in study design and data collection, guidance regarding its general and/or specific contents, analysis, and more (see Appendix A for details).

However well-intentioned non-Native (e.g., White) scholars and teachers may be, they cannot truly understand the perspectives of Indigenous students, families, communities, and teachers with the same type or level of insight that Native American authors can and do. For example, as a White American scholar, Anne Marie is not in a position to author this type of report on her own. On the other hand, White scholars can help advance this type of scholarship by bearing as much of the workload as they possibly can, so that all of this work need not fall exclusively to Native scholars and teachers.

Indeed, such collaborative Native-lead approaches are an ethical imperative for research into Native education. In line with many scholars of Indigenous studies, we seek to embody here a broader understanding of authorship than traditional Euro-Western paradigms. Most importantly, this general approach to authorship helped ensure that Native voices were ever-present in the crafting of this report.

Participants: Basic Background

Participants had different types of experiences with Native education in Washington. They were selected through snowball sampling, though we targeted individuals with a range of perspectives, including with various levels of experience: with the WEA, as classroom teachers, as parents, and as educational leaders. Moreover, the 7 Native participants came from several different Tribes, mostly within Washington though a few originated from other regions. The two White teachers also represented different overarching “archetypes” vis-à-vis the types of experience they had with Native students (e.g., one mostly in schools that serve one particular Tribe, the other in urban schools). In total, our research team conducted 9 interviews with 7 Native American participants and 2 White teachers. While many of them embodied various roles as parent, teacher, community member, and leader, we worked to ensure a representative sampling of individuals across all of these roles in selecting and inviting different participants. Some focused more on one of their roles than others in their self-presentation to us and in their interviews, which are highlighted in the organization of Table 1. These and other specifics of the participants’ backgrounds are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Description of the Research Study Participants

Native American Parents (3)	Native American Teachers (2)	Native American Administrators (2)	White Teachers (2)
<p>I. Howard is an enrolled member of a Washington Tribe who serves on his Tribal council and in that role has worked to build strong relationships between the local school district and his Tribe. He is also a Native parent who advocates for his children and youth within his community and works to educate others about the culture and history of his Tribe and the ways in which they have fought for Native American fishing rights that benefit many Tribes.</p>	<p>IV. Millie is an enrolled member of a Washington Tribe and a first-generation college graduate who entered the teaching profession in her late 30’s. She was the only non-White person in her entire cohort of pre-service teachers at a WA college/ university. She lives in a town that is predominantly</p>	<p>VI. Lisa, an enrolled member of a Tribe outside Washington, has been a social worker and now school administrator for the past decade. She worked in a middle school with a high number of students of color including Native students and worked on providing college access. She is also a parent of several children: some</p>	<p>VII. Kim is a White teacher with extensive experience in schools with nearly 100% Native students from the same Tribe. She predominantly teaches high school humanities/social science topics and is originally from the Northwest. She holds several degrees and expressed a</p>
<p>II. Weston is an enrolled member of a Washington Tribe who also serves on his Tribal</p>			

<p>council. On his daughter's first day of high school, he took that opportunity to build a relationship with the vice principal of the school and work in partnership to find ways that Native students could feel more comfortable in their school environment. Over the years these efforts have resulted in inclusion of local Tribal history and culture as well as a formal land acknowledgement agreement and the Tribal flag being hung in all schools in the district.</p>	<p>White but works at an elementary school on an eastern WA Tribal reservation.</p>	<p>have graduated from high school and some are currently enrolled in elementary and middle school.</p>	<p>commitment to social justice. She is a parent, and her children are of mixed racial backgrounds (non-Native).</p>
	<p>V. Steve comes from multiple Tribes and is also of White descent. He grew up in parts of the U.S. east of WA and attended schools in a predominately White public school system before moving to WA. He is a teacher with many years of experience and has worked in schools on and off reservation land. He is very familiar and involved with the WEA. He has a commitment to prioritizing educational opportunities for Native students throughout his career.</p>	<p>VII. Jesse is an enrolled member of a Tribe outside of Washington and comes from a family of Native educators. He has a long history of working in the Pacific Northwest states, including many years as a teacher and multiple decades as an administrator working predominantly in BIE Native American schools or public schools serving a high population of Native learners. He currently serves as an administrator of a state-run office that is very involved with Native education.</p>	<p>IX. Sadie is a White teacher who has many years experience in urban schools where there are consistently Native students, but they are in the minority population in the setting. This participant is from the Northwest and has in-depth knowledge of and vast experience with the WEA. She teaches in the realm of STEM and is a parent. Sadie also has an expressed and demonstrable commitment to social justice.</p>
<p>III. Joshua is descended from three Tribes within Washington State. However, he is not enrolled due to enrollment parameters of each Tribe. Joshua grew up in foster care situations that many Indian people are familiar with. He has children in the school system. One is on the spectrum of autism and has an IEP. Joshua is an artist and currently thinking through the implications of home/de/un-schooling his two children due to the public school's inability to appropriately respond to his children's educational and relational needs.</p>			

FINDINGS

In analyzing these data, the four research questions (RQs) that guided our study also organize these findings. We begin by addressing RQ1 regarding some core inequities that Native American students, teachers, and communities face in Washington, based on our data. A key

overarching point here in response to RQ1 is that inequities and trauma still pervasively shape Native Americans' educational experiences, which may surprise some readers of this report who wish to see otherwise. While many may consider Washington a 'progressive' state—particularly the western side—there is still a long way to go in attaining educational equity for Tribes. In the second findings section, we briefly respond to RQ2 regarding the meaning of educational equity for Tribes: The way that participants defined educational equity was in terms of *educational sovereignty*.

This then links to the third and longest findings section, which responds to RQ3 by discussing how Tribes' educational sovereignty can be reclaimed and upheld. Importantly, the project of educational equity and educational sovereignty are not merely the responsibility of Tribes but of *all* members of our society, particularly in light of the U.S.'s colonial roots and character. Finally, in the fourth findings section on RQ4, we focus squarely on educational sovereignty and what this can look like in practice. Educational sovereignty is both a national-political 'paradigm' and a 'way of life.' Meaning, the notion of educational sovereignty has political implications with regard to Native Americans' rights to self-determination. This in turn has implications for day-to-day educational institutions and practices. For instance, educational sovereignty for our participants implies that Native cultures will be at the center of educational practices and curricula, and that teachers from Tribes are best positioned to appropriately teach Native children.

Importantly, our findings are not exhaustive with regards to educational equity in Washington state vis-à-vis Tribes, nor are our findings representative of all Native Americans in Washington. Rather we present the findings that emerged as most salient in our data. After concluding all the findings sections, we end the report with concrete suggestions for educators, educational organizations, and institutions with regards to educational equity for Native American communities.

Educational Inequities and Trauma Experienced by Native American Communities (RQ1)

While there are some accounts that spark hope, overwhelmingly Native parents and educators described pervasive experiences of inequity and trauma that Native children and communities experience in their formal education. One Native educator Steve summed up various inequities in Native education, speaking candidly:

I don't see much equity in our current educational practice...We are underfunded, our students don't have the same educational opportunities that their mostly White suburban counterparts do...[W]e need a complete mindset change to refocus and reevaluate what we are doing to our students. How much are we meeting [their needs]? I see a lot [that needs] to change – how much of this has been vetted with community cooperation and input? How are... we tailor[ing] to the needs of our students? We aren't... I'm actively engaged in this fight...pushing back against the status quo.

Importantly, many of the findings in this section illustrate that settler-colonialism in Washington continues to powerfully shape education, in both overt and veiled ways.

Discrimination Against Native American Children and Communities

Notably, all but one of our participants spontaneously reported specific overt examples of racism against Native American students; the other participant also acknowledged the existence of widespread racism in the education system general. Participants described deeply disturbing incidents that they had personally experienced or witnessed—against themselves in the case of Native participants and/or against others in the case of at least one White participant. Thus, across nearly all of our interviews, we heard poignant stories as to how racism pervasively impacts Native children, parents, families, and educators. As a whole, their stories included themes about how they experience racism in its many forms (Table 1).

Table 2

Reported Impacts of Racism: Themes Across Interviews

A. Psychological violence caused by unaddressed racism in classrooms and schools
B. A lack of urgent, consistent, and cohesive policy and leadership to disrupt and address acts of racism.
C. Microaggressions, which harm Native children, families, and educators by creating an intolerable and inhospitable environment.
D. Racism as a major barrier to systemic change for those who experience it directly, those who witness it, and those who knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate it in schools.
E. The burden of the work of undoing individual and institutional racism leading to isolation and burnout of Native educators and administrators.
F. Inherent racism and bias embedded in teacher education programs, educational policy, and infrastructure.
G. The widespread prevalence of negative, deficit-based, racist attitudes and assumptions about Native students, resulting in low expectations and curtailing their future career aspirations.

One of our Native fathers and administrators shared that he still carries the pain of growing up in a time when overt racism was more socially acceptable and remembers being a child attending an off-reservation school where Indians were referred to as “Wagon Burners.” While this father was a K-12 student approximately three decades ago, another participant, a Native American educator named Steve explained: “It is 2021, we’re still inherently not too different than 2001, or 1981, 1961. The buildings [may have] changed, the tools [have] changed – but what has *systematically* changed?” (emphasis added).

As another example of several of the points from Table 2 (e.g., 1-3), one of the Native educators that we interviewed, Lisa shared heartbreaking testimony of her personal experiences with racism, including incidents that she and her son had been subjected to in his school, where his mother (Lisa) also worked.

Last year... [a] boy [in my son's class] used the N-word... My son was in that classroom as well... he's multiracial and...identifies [both] as Black⁸ [and as Native]... this student [who had used the N-word] was able to go to two more classes with... [my son and other] African-American students in the classroom that had heard this [slur]. [Those Black students] were impacted by this....I brought this to the attention of the administrators, they did not know what to do. They did not react swiftly. Whenever there is a violent fight that breaks out in the school or a kid gets caught with drugs or...[are] high at school, they [administrators] literally would drop everything and... address it...immediately, on the spot...take it so seriously. They did not take this situation in that same manner...it was almost like a ping pong of like 'who should handle it?' 'How should they handle it?'...The lack of training within the system - for them to address these types of things it was there, you could see it... I expressed [to the principal a concern about] the lack of urgency and the psychological damage that this could cause on our students. Just because it's not physical violence — this is psychological violence... with our students...[E]ven after it was all over, his [the principal's] response...was, 'Well, I don't think we're going to make a protocol or a procedure around this, but it was a good conversation to have.'

Lisa also raises an excellent point about the need for policies and procedures in school for dealing with incidents of racism against children. These would be resources for teachers and administrators to address such psychologically traumatic events better in the future. Importantly, Lisa and her child are not alone when it comes to Native American students, including multiracial Native students, experiencing racism. Lisa explained: "There were many instances where things like this came up—racial slurs, implicit bias from teachers, teachers [being identified as]...racist by...students, and leadership not doing anything about it." She reports one child having used racial slurs five times in the same month against children from minoritized backgrounds, without any notable action taking place in response. In addition to all of the Native participants, both of the White teachers we interviewed had also witnessed racism in their schools and also opined that this is a major obstacle for Native American children.

Expanding this from beyond the walls of any individual classroom, one White teacher Sadie, who had strong connections and vast experience with the WEA described it as: in the midst of efforts to combat a "culture of White supremacy" within the organization itself. White supremacy "refers to a system of violence and oppression which upholds beliefs and practices in society structured around a White racial ideal" (Jaffee & Casey, 2021, p. 694). She reported observing attempts to change this and believing the WEA is improving when it comes to issues of equity and inclusion, but that there is much work to do still.

Another White teacher participant, Kim, had approximately a decade of experience teaching in Native communities. She described major barriers to educational equity for Native students in

⁸The child's mother is Native American and father is Black. Like many Native American children, this child's racio-ethnic and social identity is not monolithic.

terms of microaggressions, which are “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership (e.g., race, gender, culture, religion, social class, sexual orientation, etc.)” as defined by Torino et al. (2019). Kim explained:

Microaggressions... [a]re everywhere... in TV... movies... social media... in everyday life. Particularly, I think when you have teachers who are not [from the Tribe]...those microaggressions...exist...They just do. All of us - we might say something or act in a certain way - we don't necessarily mean to...but...we...our [U.S.] society has been built upon racism... So, I think... that's going to be the largest barrier... for kids... Because [as a non-Native teacher] you're constantly putting [Native American] kids down, even though you don't necessarily know that you are. You're not aware of it [as a non-Native person].... Because of those microaggressions... kids can lose that relatedness or that autonomy, they can start to lose some of that intrinsic motivation that they might have to do anything.

Importantly, Kim identifies as non-Native herself and did not seem to make these statements as a way of demeaning other non-Native teachers. Rather, throughout her interview, she positioned herself as a White woman who sought to learn about and from the Tribal communities that she taught in: We imagine that this is how many readers of this report likely feel as well, which we believe is a very positive starting point.

Kim also pointed out the implicit bias and systemic racism that shape how White teachers think about education and act in those roles. She acknowledged that growth and learning were and continue to be part of her development as a non-Native teacher of Native children. Thus, in many respects, we present this quote from Kim as a call to action for non-Native teachers to: 1) first acknowledge the limitations of their knowledge, 2) learn and grow to be better educators of Native American students, and 3) also meaningfully and consistently support Native American educators who have the type of knowledge that Kim and other non-Native educators often lack (e.g., supporting Native children personally, in their education, in their career advancement, etc.).

Interestingly, this White educator described teachers' own inherent racism and bias as a challenge or barrier to these teachers themselves, including those who are trying to serve and teach Native children. This struck us as fascinating; we had not previously heard anyone describe an individual's own racism or bias as a challenge that they themselves face. Often, this is instead described as a power dynamic that affects only those against whom they are biased or discriminatory. This teacher Kim believes that Washington educational organizations could at least begin addressing some of these gaps in knowledge and experience through meaningful types of professional development on these issues. Importantly, almost none of the participants in the study recalled any professional development opportunities at a state-level—particularly not through WEA—that address racism and other forms of discrimination that plague Native education in particular.

Kim later explained her thoughts on ‘solving’ racism: “[C]hanging our entire way of life and how White people think about Native Americans is going to be completely beyond the scope of what a school could do.” Indeed, other participants in the study beyond Kim similarly echoed that a

major overhaul of the education system is needed to truly attain educational equity for Native American students. Thus, there are both short-term and long-term goals that are participants identified in the struggle for educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes in Washington.

Obstacles That Native American Educators Face

Native American children are not the only ones who experience discrimination in the settler-colonial education system. To the contrary, other key participants in schooling—Native American teachers and staff—do as well. Vast amounts of research have documented the myriad benefits of creating more space for teachers from minoritized backgrounds in K-12 schools (Carter Andrews *et al.*, 2019; Hutcheson, 1993; Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014). For example, teachers from the same minoritized backgrounds as the students they serve are typically better able to connect with those students, leading to better outcomes for the students and communities. Meaning, in order to improve Native education in Washington state, we need more Native educators. Currently, though, Native educators experience many barriers, including discrimination and racism in schools.

The experience of one Native participant, Lisa, is reflective of how racism in schools adversely affects Native educators: Working in Washington schools, “I will never say that I was able to be my whole full authentic self just because the nature of the system just doesn't permit...that.” Lisa went on to explain that when she first began working as in the state education system, she “would be very quiet and not vocal.” She goes on to say, “I was scared to bring...up [any inequities and discrimination that I witnessed or experienced] because you never know how it's going to impact your job or...can they fire you over this?” She explains what it was like to see overt racism in the school:

Once I started building relationships with people in the school and people learn[ed]...about me, I was able to be more of myself...That was a very fine line... always balancing and trying to understand what my boundaries are and if I'm going too far or not going enough.... that was a constant awareness that I had to battle with [...] I [only] had a couple people in the school that were people of color and that definitely shared similar experiences that I did. So just the lack of understanding and...lack of support when these things [i.e., racist incidents] did come up [was very difficult].

Lisa went on to explain that by being one of the few ‘non-White’ educators at her school, she had to “continuously” be one of the few staff members “to advocate” for equity and the rights of Native students.

One of the White teachers we interviewed, Sadie, also noted how problematic this is in her urban school. Sadie explained how compelled she feels to advocate for teachers of color in the WEA and in her school as a necessary means of fostering positive social change. Sadie also admitted that she at times struggles to confront colleagues in her school who behave or speak in racist and/or biased ways, identifying this as a weakness she feels that is part of her socialization as a White woman—one that she reports seeing in many other White women.

This is a noteworthy observation, seeing that White women comprise the vast majority of educators in Washington. Moreover, based on our extensive observations of Sadie and other settings, it is worth noting that she would be considered by many standards to be a very sociopolitically conscientious person (e.g., when it comes to educational inequities). The fact that even a self-described “woke”⁹ educator like Sadie admits that she at times avoids confronting colleagues who say or act in racist ways gives us reason to pause. Collectively, we must think about ways that the educational system, policies, and teacher training sessions can support White educators, even those who ostensibly have a strong socio-political consciousness, to be better able to constructively confront discriminatory behaviors, actions, and systems in their own schools.

The importance of non-Native and particularly White educators taking on this work of confronting racism and bias in their schools is highlighted in data from our Native American participants. For instance, in discussing her experiences as a Native American educator, Lisa went on to explain how oftentimes “nothing comes out of” her efforts to combat racism in the school, meaning “no real action” by administrators or the system. In reflecting on the incident described previously in the report, where the “N-word” was used in her son’s classroom and minimal action or change was taken in response, Lisa goes on to say:

That was very disheartening...to be candid: I almost stopped working for... public schools because of that. When you're surrounded by people that don't understand and they're not doing that work [of combating racism] as well, you feel alone...it's heavy. It's almost a burden but you know it's the burden that you must withhold. You can't let that burden go. So....it can become very isolating and emotionally and mentally draining - where I can imagine it probably causes a lot of burnout.

Many Native educators in our study spoke to this theme — the feelings of isolation and fear that Lisa articulated as one of the few Native Americans on the school staff.

Other Settler-Colonial Dynamics: The Purpose and Culture of Education

In addition to issues of discrimination such as those described in the previous pages, other salient dynamics of settler-colonialism—which are perhaps less marked though no less important—were described by many of our participants as major barriers to educational equity for Tribes in Washington. While we do not seek to exhaustively document the mechanics of settler-colonial dynamics in education here (although see Hand, 2020; Lees, Topp Laman & Calderón, 2021; McCoy, Tuck & McKenzie, 2016), we emphasize that systemic biases and other dynamics of settler-colonialism are often ‘invisible’ to White educators especially. One basic issue that our participants noted relates to colonial assumptions about education—the purpose of it and what ways of educating are culturally relevant (also see Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2017). Some if not many educators in Washington might be surprised to learn that what constitutes appropriate and relevant education varies greatly across cultures.

⁹Sadie described herself as “woke” in response to a direct question from the researcher as to whether Sadie felt like she was “representative” of other educators in Washington. Meaning, Sadie identified as “woke” unpresumptuously, only when prompted, and in a ‘tongue in cheek’ manner. The researcher interviewing her has known Sadie for years and can confirm that she is “woke,” to echo this colloquial albeit quite descriptive term.

When culturally appropriate education is not implemented, this results in myriad problems for minoritized students and communities—including those from Tribes.

Indeed, in many of the interviews from our data, Native participants expressed frustration at how pervasively Euro-Western, colonial epistemologies (i.e., values and ways of being) dominate all aspects of education in their communities and for their children. For example, Euro-Western colonial epistemologies dictate many school practices that determine who does or does not graduate from high school. These include rigid attendance policies that are sensitive neither to the ways that Native American cultures in Washington view learning nor to cultural practices at their heart of their lifeworlds, which often clash with various aspects of the settler-colonial school system. One Native parent and teacher explained:

[Many educators] just...perpetuate the same cycle, not a lot has really been changed since the creation of the education system...We're still doing the same things, we may do cultural responsive training and there are more people of color that are in teacher and administrator positions but we're still under the same system...One of the bigger things is being disconnected from our culture and our ability to learn our languages in the school system - because that's...how we can break that cycle... by learning our language and not just one class that's elective but...something that our kids are immersed in every day.

Related closely to this, another participant, Millie, explained that, “cultural activities help bridge the gap....and...teach...the history.”

Some data from the study as well as our own experiences suggest that many Washington state educators align themselves more (consciously or unconsciously) with dominant cultural norms and expectations regarding the aims of education. Widespread understanding of the purpose of education among Washington educators—who are predominately White—likely tend to be limited to simply being ‘college and career ready’ as opposed to engaging students in developing a more robust and culturally informed vision for their future. Indeed, some of our data reflect this observation.

However, when we asked Native parents and educators about the goal of education for their children and students, we received markedly different responses. For instance, Millie shared:

I think an ideal schooling experience would be where our kids are taught accurate versions of history; where our students are provided with the same materials, technologies and learning access and opportunities as all other students in more affluent areas; where learning didn’t only take place at a desk in a room being dictated to the kids and where their lives and experiences didn’t automatically create a disadvantage on the standardized tests. I think the most ideal learning environment for my students on the reservation would be not having to change the way they think and speak in order to be successful off the reservation.

Importantly, settler-colonial educational systems, (e.g., standardized tests, high school graduation requirements, state curricula) are imbued with enormous power, which is extremely problematic in Native Education seeing that the Native American communities often have very

little say in their design. While every-day teaching practices and high-stakes assessments are not congruent with Native American cultures, Native communities are often beholden to these. Meaning, a Native American child's well-being—present and future—depends on them succeeding in these colonial practices and measures, which is profoundly unjust.

In light of this reality, we noticed a tension in our data that could best be described as the 'double-edged sword' of settler-colonial education for Native children and communities: Native children are educated within a colonial system that does not value or reflect their cultures, epistemologies, and lifeworlds in general; nonetheless, many families view this same educational system as a socio-economic necessity for their children. For instance, Native educator and parent Lisa spoke about an ongoing lack of trust with the institution of schooling: "Knowing what has happened [throughout history to our Tribes] and what continues to happen to our children in terms of assimilation—and just the way that we are treated" makes many Native communities see state education as a colonizing, traumatizing, and assimilationist force. Lisa went on to explain how assimilation perpetuates itself:

Our society is set up [so] that we need education. We have got to graduate from high school if you want to get a decent paying job that's going to support us because we have to have money to live in this society....[T]hen in order for you to be a little more comfortable you probably have to go to college [...] that dichotomy of knowing the [colonial] history and understanding that [trauma] on a very personal level — and then knowing that this is the only option that my children have in order for them not to be dependent or to struggle in life financially...

The quote above about the 'double-edged sword' of the colonial educational experience for Native American students comes from the perspective of a parent. Teacher participants seemed to recognize this double-edged sword as well, at least implicitly. For instance, Steve speaks to this in the following quote about Native American students:

We need to stop [lowering] our expectations. Race does not equal inferiority. Socioeconomics does not equal inferiority. Do not make a case for why our students will fail before they have even started! If you started a race, and were told...you had no chance — how motivated would you be to even try? We talk our students into failure before they even know what failure is — and that has to stop [...] We're already conditioned [to think] that Native kids will fail... and just accept it is inevitable. I've seen and heard teachers in my own district do this consistently, and describe what they saw as substandard behavior performance as 'an Indian thing,' and blindly accept it.... Our students are different, and that is okay. Our achievement levels are not inferior, they're just measured in inappropriate ways — we can do better!

To conclude this first findings section in response to RQ1, we have sought to illustrate the difficult reality that Native American education in Washington is plagued with inequities, trauma, and systems rooted in settler-colonialism. Thus, one imperative for the WEA and educators in general is to acknowledge this reality within education and find ways to combat discrimination and dismantle other settler-colonial practices and systems. Before we discuss

particular ways of doing this as suggested by our data, we first explore what educational equity means for Tribes in Washington. This is the focus of our next section.

Educational Equity from Native American Perspectives: Educational Sovereignty (RQ2)

In order to understand *how* to advance educational equity in Native Education in Washington, an important starting place is understanding *what* exactly this concept means to Tribes. Across interviews, we saw that several of our participants equated educational equity with educational sovereignty. Some made this connection explicitly and others a bit more implicitly and/or conceptually. As mentioned previously, we define educational sovereignty as Native peoples' right to determine their/our own educational priorities, practices, and more. Moreover, "the source(s) of Indigenous educational sovereignty" are the Tribal peoples' "cultural, political, and religious viewpoints on community, land, and sovereignty [itself]" (Anthony-Stevens *et al.*, 2017, p. 28 citing Warrior, 1995, p. 57). Meaning, Indigenous epistemologies and intellectualizing around Indigenous culture, politics, and cosmology are foundational to educational sovereignty. Educational sovereignty also refers to educational "spaces," broadly conceived, "where Indigenous peoples have the right to 'write, speak and act from a position of agency'" (Giroux, 2001, p. xv, as cited in Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002, p. 28).

One Native American participant, Lisa, spontaneously brought up "educational sovereignty" as a means of conceptualizing educational equity for Tribes in Washington during the interview that the researcher on our team conducted with her:

Researcher: Is there anything else that you would like to say about the issue of educational justice or educational equity in Native American education?

Lisa: Yes...if we are going to really serve our students, the concept of Tribal sovereignty... educational sovereignty and self-determination are things that people [namely Washington educators] need to have a good understanding of. [This includes] our epistemologies and how that has been invalidated by the dominant epistemologies of European societies moving here - and our relationship that we had with the earth...and ...that disconnect [between Native American and White Euro-Western epistemologies] ...The dominant society does not think that way, nor do they operate that way because we live in a capitalist society where we take, take, take. I don't even know if they really truly understand the concept of reciprocity and just the way we used to do things. We didn't just take, we exchanged... I was listening to [one of our Tribal cultural experts] and he talked about the...Tribal history...[We]...were the caretakers of this land and the river...When other Indigenous people would come here, they would have to exchange... fish [or] whatever was in their environment...We hunted because we needed to survive and...didn't...disrespect...the animals but knew that in order for us to survive we had to take that life and we did it in a very honorable way, by having ceremony and understanding...That has to be part of our system if we want anything to change. Our epistemologies have to be at the forefront of what we do...How do you do that in this [Euro-American] system that doesn't even value our way, how we used to live, and then how we have to live today...The idea of us having to decolonize to even

do that ...especially when...so many people such as myself, that grew up being very disconnected from their culture because assimilation actually worked for all the different reasons...What if that child never gets the opportunity to do that work [of understanding the history, culture, and epistemologies of one's Tribe] on their own like I did?. [The White Euro-Western] education system...they are responsible for this - they definitely played a role in this - so what is their responsibility in undoing what has been done?

This interview points to the importance of Indigenous culture, history, and epistemologies as underpinnings of educational sovereignty and illustrates how educational sovereignty is part of Tribal sovereignty more broadly. To be clear, Tribes in Washington do not currently experience educational sovereignty, at least not to the degree they have the right to and need to.

Two of our other participants explicitly identified educational sovereignty as critical to educational equity in Native communities as well. For example, in his interview, Joshua linked equity and sovereignty to school standards:

Joshua: I've been just wishing that we could have sovereignty... to... make our own school standards.... because...people who have never been here or seen our kids or interacted in our schools are making the rules for how our teachers are supposed to act...[S]o of course, they [policymakers and state education administrators] want to do what's best for the kids, but they're being pulled between two things.

One of the White teachers, Kim, who participated in the study and had several years of experience teaching in Native American communities also explicitly confirmed the importance of educational sovereignty. Kim had at points in the interview described the benefits of the Tribe whose children she taught having autonomy over various aspects of education, including for example 1) their decision to ban a harmful non-Native teacher from the reservation lands and 2) how funding from the Tribe that contributed to improve the high school. Later in the interview, at the moment when the topic of educational sovereignty came up, Kim was similarly describing how effectively the Tribe was able to respond to COVID-19. Importantly, this Tribe has been widely praised by regional governments as a role model for how they dealt with COVID-19 (e.g., protecting the community by containing the virus and then efficiently disseminating vaccines), compared to non-Tribal communities in Washington, for example. Kim said, "Because the [Tribal] government is right here...[necessary action in situations like these] happens [quickly]...It's just done, you know what I mean?" The interviewer then asked:

Researcher: Would you consider that kind of independence [.] is that related to the Tribe's sovereignty would you say?

Kim: Yeah...Absolutely. Yeah. They can do whatever they want [in responding to COVID-19 for example]. What's nice is they can move [to appropriate COVID-19 response] phases very quickly because...it happens that day. They move to a phase [officially], and it's effective immediately, as soon as they have the [Tribal council] meeting [...] It's been really great.

Educational sovereignty is an issue of educational equity for Tribes for numerous reasons, one of which Kim alludes to in the interview data above, which is the basic issue of *control*. The overarching concept of ‘sovereignty’ means that a group has autonomous control over their ways of life, resources, and collective existence. This includes rights to “self-government,” “self-education,” (Anthony Stevens et al., 2017, p. 20) and “linguistic and cultural expression” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002, p. 284).

In the excerpts above, Native participants Joshua and Lisa brought up and explicitly connected concepts of ‘educational equity’ and ‘educational sovereignty.’ Similarly, Native Hawaiian scholar, Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (2013) links sovereignty to aspects of educational equity: “to practice sovereign pedagogies is to recognize the sovereignty of both the personal and collective levels as crucial for health and the optimal learning of Indigenous people, *as it is for all people*” (p. 6, emphasis added). Just as sovereignty in general is “the bedrock of well-being” for Indigenous communities (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017, p. 34), *educational* sovereignty is “the bedrock” of *educational* well-being in Indigenous communities. Importantly, then, supporting educational sovereignty for Indigenous communities is not ‘optional’ but rather a universal responsibility for all of us who engage with or exist alongside Native American communities in Washington.

To summarize, in light of the data presented throughout this section, our response to RQ2 is that *educational equity in Native American communities requires educational sovereignty*. Unfortunately, this does not mean that educational sovereignty is a reality for Tribes in Washington. Nonetheless, participants in the current study reported ways that some aspects of this exist despite the fact that there is still a long way to go before full educational sovereignty is achieved.

Reclaiming Educational Sovereignty: Pathways Forward (RQ3)

To quote McCarty and Lee (2014), “Tribal sovereignty”—which is the legal status of Native American nations today—“must” entail educational sovereignty (p. 102). Since Tribes in Washington have been barred from exercising ‘full-fledged’ educational sovereignty, it is difficult to say exactly what this looks like. However, participants in the current study did provide some ideas and evidence as to what steps need to be taken in order to attain educational sovereignty.

Importantly, we do not seek—nor are we able—to offer a complete vision of educational sovereignty for all Tribes in Washington in this findings section. For one, educational sovereignty by definition is “nonstandard, non-prescriptive...situated, relational” and rooted in the local (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017, p. 34). Meaning, it looks differently for different Tribes. We simply highlight in this section salient themes related to the process of reclaiming educational sovereignty that our nine participants spoke about.

This third findings section is our longest one and divided into two major subcomponent parts, corresponding to RQ3.a and RQ3.b. (Within each of these, there are then other smaller

subsections as well.) First, in response to RQ3.a, we focus on *systemic barriers* to educational sovereignty, discussing major systemic changes that our participants called for. The second part, in response to RQ3.b, is slightly more ‘positive’ in that we focus on *necessary supports* in the process of Tribes being able to reclaim educational sovereignty. Nonetheless, all of these subcomponents in this third overarching findings section address growth and change that we believe is needed to allow educational sovereignty to take hold. Meaning, these are all areas where improvement is needed.

Obstacles to Educational Sovereignty: Problematic Systems, Policies, and Implementation (RQ3.a)

One of our Native participants with vast experience at all levels of Native education including as a parent, explained the importance of policies that support educational sovereignty. “We’ve got to really make change with laws.” Otherwise put, addressing inequities in Native education needs to happen at a systemic level in order to address the myriad barriers that prevent Tribes from achieving educational sovereignty as a form of educational equity. In this section, we address policies and systems that especially impinge upon educational sovereignty. Countless examples undoubtedly exist, though we focus on those that emerged as salient from our participants. These include standardized assessments, uneven support for the new Since Time Immemorial (STI) curriculum, and lack of support for schooling models that afford Tribes greater control over schooling in their communities—namely State-Education Tribal Compact (STEC) schools. While these are in some ways different topics, they interlink in many ways.

Standards and high-stakes assessments. Standardized assessments are high-stakes, with implications that affect all aspects of students' current lives and future prospects. Participants from our study widely reported feeling as though Native American voices are often absent from the process of designing these assessments and the standards around which they are based. Assessment that is locally established and culturally relevant is needed to redefine success and achievement beyond standardized measurement tools. One Native American participant who is an education administrator, Jesse, explained that the statewide data reveals serious injustice for Native students as the assessment data does not accurately demonstrate what they know nor is it aligned with their learning needs.

Many standardized tests are based around particular types of knowledge and understanding, namely those that prevail in White American culture. Many participants echoed the following words of Joshua:

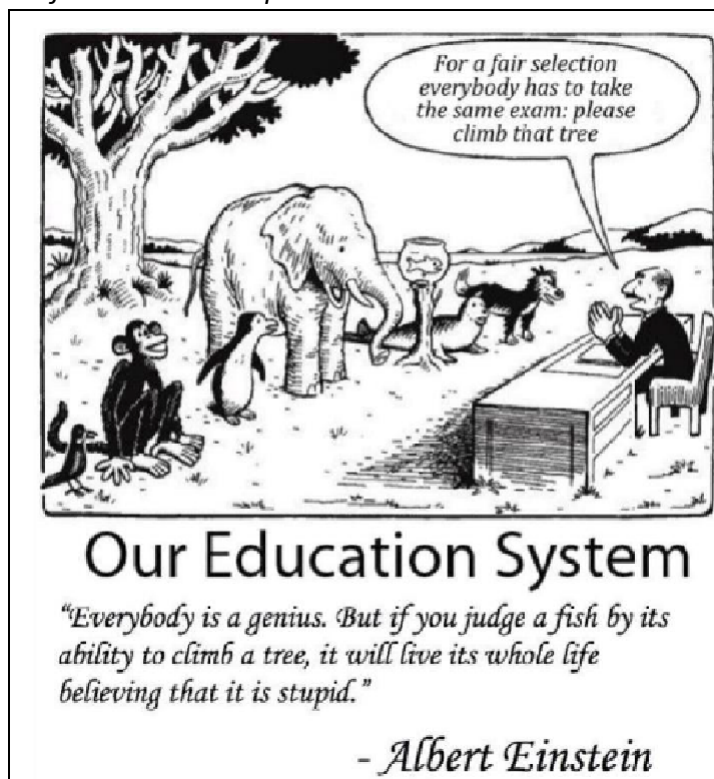
I think the biggest one [obstacle to educational sovereignty and equity for Native American children] is testing. We have these testing standards for the entire state and...the state...[is] trying to hold our kids to a standard that is not for them. [I]t's not made for them, it was made for people with different experiences and different lives. Bringing equity to the testing would be, I think a huge thing...[M]y son...he has these standards that he's supposed to meet, and he doesn't learn in the way that will get him to meet those standards.

Steve told us that leaders in Native education in Washington, including what appear to be a relatively small number within the WEA, “[seek] to find ways to engage our students better, and... assessment that also more accurately reflects what our students’ true levels of achievement are – Not by ‘one-size-fits-all’ standardized testing, but by locally established, culturally relevant means that more accurately capture the educational achievement of our students.” Steve went on to explain in a written interview response to us:

We need to once and for all understand that where students are evaluated (i.e., standardized testing) FAILS to accurately reflect achievement in our student population. I am...constantly reminded of the cartoon [Figure 1] I’ve included [as part of my interview] whenever someone brings up the ‘achievement gap’ of Native students versus the ‘norm’... The instrument is inherently flawed, yet we’ll subject our students to big testing interests that don’t accurately reflect achievement but reward districts with the disposable cash flow to learn how to test better. It is not... [nor] has ever been about achievement, it is about familiarity and access to the right set of standardized testing strategies (available at a price) that make the difference in scores. We need to develop our own community vetted standards on what achievement looks like for our kids, and if involves becoming a Tribal compact school to achieve this - It is past time to make this happen. This process must be standards-based, and relevant, and be a collaborative effort between teachers, [administrators], students, community, and local Tribal government.

Figure 1

Artifact From Participant Steve



Uneven Implementation of the Since Time Immemorial Curriculum. One policy in Washington state that aims to support Native education is the STI curriculum, which grew out of HB 1495 (2005). Since its inception, STI has been optional for schools to implement. New legislation will require an implementation deadline of September 2023. “In 2015, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 5433 modifying the original 2005 legislation, now requiring the Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington or other Tribally-developed curriculum be taught in all schools. The use of the Since Time Immemorial curriculum has been endorsed by all 29 federally recognized Tribes” (Washington Office of Native Education, 2021, para. 1). Here is a summary of the STI curriculum’s aims, to quote from that website:

“The STI sovereignty curriculum uses three approaches (para. 6)”:

- 1) “An inquiry-based approach with five essential questions” (para. 6):
 - a) “How does physical geography affect the distribution, culture, and economic life of local Tribes?” (para. 6)
 - b) “What is the legal status of Tribes who negotiated or who did not negotiate settlement for compensation for the loss of their sovereign homelands?” (para. 6)
 - c) “What were the political, economic, and cultural forces consequential to the treaties that led to the movement of Tribes from long established homelands to reservations?” (para. 6)
 - d) “What are ways in which Tribes respond to the threats and outside pressure to extinguish their cultures and independence?” (para. 6)
 - e) “What do local Tribes do to meet the challenges of reservation life; and as sovereign nations, what do local Tribes do to meet the economic and cultural needs of their Tribal communities?” (para. 6)
- 2) “A place-based approach. Our approach encourages teachers and students to address the essential questions in the context of Tribes in their own communities” (para. 7)
- 3) “An integrated approach. Teachers choose how much time to spend on Tribal sovereignty content to complete their units throughout the year. The integrated approach provides three levels of curriculum for each of the OSPI recommended social studies units, each level building on the last. Tribal sovereignty lessons are aligned to the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts. Where appropriate, units build toward successful completion of Content Based Assessments” (para. 8)¹⁰

The OSPI website goes on to explain: “The Office of Native Education [ONE] within the OSPI frequently schedules *Since Time Immemorial Tribal* sovereignty curriculum training” for Washington educators (Washington Office of Native Education, 2021, para. 9). STI and the

¹⁰ This list and text is taken verbatim from para. 6-8 of the Washington Office of Native Education, 2021) website.

trainings are done through partnerships among “private and public agencies and the Federally Recognized Tribes in Washington” (Washington Office of Native Education, 2021, para. 10).¹¹

Participants in our study did not take issue with STI itself, and they support such efforts to teach all children in Washington about Native history and culture. Rather, the concerns that our participants raised about STI relate to the gaps and imbalances in this curriculum, particularly as they concern Tribes in the Eastern part of the state.

Some participants also reported another type of concern: there is an uneven adoption of STI with one administrator participant reporting that only 50% of school districts currently implement the curricula. Thus, one area in need of improvement is simply increased teaching of STI across more districts. “HB 1495 identifies collaboration between Tribal governments in public schools and administrators as a priority” (Winstead, 2014, p. 8). This involves “collaborative government-to-government relationships” (HB 1495, 2005). A focus of this has in the past been relationship-building between Native and non-Native communities. Recent legislation has focused on the role that school districts can play in developing relationships with their closest geographical Tribal neighbor as a means of adapting and supplementing the STI curriculum. One of our participants Millie argued that it is also in Tribes’ interests to partner with schools so that they have control over how they would like to share their history, culture, and as a method of breaking down racism and stereotypes.

I think teams need to be created and each team should work with the Tribes in our state (federally and non- federally recognized Tribes) and other entities, such as the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs], that would have documents and knowledge of how historical events really happened...[B]ooks need to be written and curriculum needs to be created for educators to access.

A prominent leader in Native education statewide, Weston reported on his experiences with such collaborations:

What we were hearing was a lot of the teachers and the schools were worried about offending Tribes when it comes to the Native curriculum. We have the Since Time Immemorial curriculum and a lot of the teachers, we were hearing they didn’t feel comfortable...I felt like they were using that as an excuse...Well, we’re not going to allow you to use that anymore as an excuse. We’re going to come into the schools. We’re going to commit our time as Tribal leaders to come in and educate you guys. We talk about [our Tribe], we talk about the Fishing Wars, the Boldt decision, and the history around our area, but I think the main thing is that we have 29 Tribes here in the state. There’s no reason why the schools shouldn’t be trying to work with the Tribes.

Limited support for Tribal Compact Schools. These schools are reservation-based with the benefit of Tribal wrap-around services. They generate trust with students and their families,

¹¹ The OSPI/ONE caution educators that adaptations to STI content and materials “should be considered carefully so as not to impact this thoughtfully crafted content design or introduce any unintended cultural bias” (Washington Office of Native Education, 2021, para. 11).

have a deep understanding of their students' identities and educational needs, and are going beyond culturally relevant instruction to offer full inclusion of culture and Native language. This has resulted in students with higher levels of engagement, attendance, and an opportunity to learn about topics that are personally and culturally meaningful to them. One of our participants with administrative experience with Native education statewide, Jesse made the case that "our public schools could learn from our State Tribal Education Compact (STEC) schools if they're truly interested in taking care of our Native learners." While graduation rates across public schools in Washington average 66%, many STEC schools' averages are between 92-98% (Washington Office of Native Education, 2021).

We believe that one key aspect of the good outcomes that STECs have, as reflected in these data, is that they represent a model through which Tribes have increased sovereignty over education in their community through this system. However, there are currently obstacles to this model of schooling. For one, STECs are not eligible for some key sources of funding, so they often lack adequate resources.

Additionally, accurate data is critical for assessing and understanding Native students' needs across the state. For example, STECs' comparatively high graduation rates represent an important piece of data. Data sharing agreements between Washington State School Directors' Association and Tribes have involved a lot of Native educators who helped to shape this legislation and shared effective practices. More data sharing is needed still.

To summarize, these three examples illustrate policy-related obstacles to educational sovereignty— 1) standards and assessments, 2) uneven implementation of STI, and 3) lack of support for successful models of Native education such as STECs. There are undoubtedly other policies and systems that impinge upon Tribes' educational sovereignty. We highlight the three examples above because they emerged as salient in our data. We next turned to other types of growth that must occur on the pathway towards educational sovereignty.

Supports for Educational Sovereignty: Necessary Growth and Change (RQ 3.b.)

Responding to the second part of RQ3 (part b), in this findings section we discuss *necessary supports* in the process of Tribes being able to reclaim educational sovereignty. These relate primarily to 1) increased representation of Native teachers in schools, 2) non-Native teacher learning about Tribes, and 3) state educators building relationships with Tribes. Importantly, these are areas that our participants identified as in need of improvement. Meaning, while these three topics, to be discussed below, are what we consider to be key 'supports' for educational sovereignty, they are nonetheless currently lacking in Washington.

"Growing Our Own": Increasing Native Educator Representation. Having Native educators teaching Native children, particularly children from their own Tribe, is considered here to be a "gold standard" of Native education. Meaning, increasing the number of Native educators, administrators, and paraprofessionals will go a long way toward attaining educational sovereignty. Currently, though, Native American educators are still few and far

between. One of our participants, Jesse, a foremost leader in Native education statewide, described the dire lack of Native teacher representation in Washington:

We [leaders in state education] took a look at that data...[regarding] the amount of certified teachers [who are Native]...and...para-professional Native folks within the state of Washington. The numbers are staggering. [...] There's a huge dis-proportionality [i.e., underrepresentation] of...Native educators, within our system...What we're trying to do...is trying to clear that pathway, 'What does that look like in a grow-your-own type of setting?' Take a look at University of Washington...Washington State University, and others...what that could look like to help out with everybody pulling together as one type of thing and figuring this out.

Among our Native and non-Native participants, there was overwhelming consensus that White teachers and administrators are greatly overrepresented in relation to Native students, teachers and administrators. This has clear implications for issues of educational equity and educational sovereignty vis-à-vis regional Tribes. Participants expressed a need for the WEA, OSPI, universities, and other organizations and institutions to better support and grow the corps of Native teachers and paraprofessionals. In order to do so, participants also pointed to the importance of setting specific goals and allocating resources to make the teaching workforce more intentionally diverse.

One of our Native participants Lisa explained at length the importance of Native teacher representation in education while touching on a wide range of issues that this involves:

How are we addressing hiring practices...and...creating programs that are intentionally targeting people of color...in the...school where these kids might want to be teachers [...] so they can come back and work in their community...How are we keeping those people in our community and ensuring that we are paying them what they're worth [...] [Also] you have the larger policies that are going to impact all of these things because you're going to have people that don't want to do this...[W]hat are the policy changes that have to be made to make sure this work is going to be done? And...[the] blueprint to implement it [...] It is very complex, it's going to be a lot of work... but I think those are some steps that could happen...[J]ust making sure that our kids are seeing themselves in the schools...they see who they are, they understand and they feel valued. They feel part of the community...How do you do that?...I think it starts with also educating our community. Where's that community and education relationship and not just the typical middle-class White lady that comes to all the meetings.

Lisa also goes on to explain the importance of representation in the teaching workforce as a critical component of educational equity and sovereignty: to “intentionally [make]... sure that the teaching corps is not just comprised of a majority of White, female, Christian, straight women.” Lisa described policies that aim to increase representation of Native educators—policies that ensure that “we're recruiting, hiring, and retaining educators of color”—as “decolonizing” in nature.

Importantly, both in-service and preservice supports for Native American educators/future educators are critical to increasing representation in this regard. Another Native American participant, Millie, described her experiences at a regional college during her years in preservice teacher training:

I didn't like living on [this] side of this state at first...the town I live in is tiny and predominately White. Also, I was the only non-White person in my entire cohort at [my college]. I wanted to work somewhere where I felt included and where I was making the biggest difference and that was on the reservation closest to me.

This Native American participant is not alone in her descriptions of isolation in her preservice teacher preparation program. Ample evidence from countless sources point to the difficulties that Native teachers face in their teacher preparation programs. Pavel, Banks and Pavel (2002) describe the importance of community-building in teacher preparation programs that aim to nurture Native American, preservice educators. Teacher-educator (i.e., faculty) relationships with students should ideally mirror those of a family, as much as possible (Pavel *et al.*, 2002).

When it comes to efforts to increase representation of Native American teachers, both on-the-ground work and higher up policy play an important role. As a Native parent and a leader in Native education Weston explained: "We've got to get the right people in there who want to see change, a protection of environmental places, our sacred places." This Tribal council member explained that this type of change involves 1) changing and enacting policy that supports Native educators and 2) 'cultivating' the rise of educational policymakers who are immersed in Tribal knowledge and have a strong cultural identity. While the current subsection has focused on the importance of Native American representation among educators, administrators, and education policymakers, we now turn the discussion to another group of educators who more often work with Native students at the present time: non-Native educators.

Non-Native Educators' Learning and Development. The following words of Lisa echo the sentiment expressed by all of our Native participants as they discussed the pathway for attaining educational sovereignty: "The [dominant colonial] system needs to be educated first." Meaning, all of the Native participants in our study were in agreement that White Americans should play an important role in supporting educational sovereignty, and the first step is their learning more about Native history, culture, and worldviews. Related to this, across interviews, Native and non-Native participants overwhelmingly identified the need for increased professional development opportunities and other forms of teacher learning with regards to Native education.

Joshua explained this, saying: "I know there's...diversity training for the teachers. But I think that can only go so far, because it's kind of *general* diversity training." All of our participants explained that the diversity training that they have been offered as educators through professional and educational organizations in Washington did not focus specifically on Native education, but rather on minoritized groups in general. Many participants explained that due to the vast differences between Native students and communities on the one hand and other

minoritized groups on the other—related for example to the matter of Tribal sovereignty and connections to the land—specific training focusing on Native education is critical for non-Native teachers to undergo. Another participant Jesse suggested that the state of Washington should introduce 8-10 hours of required “cultural awareness” professional development training for educators/administrators as part of their 100 hours needed for certification or re-certification.

As one Native participant Howard who is a Tribal leader, parent, and educator explained: Part of this education is breaking down the stereotypes of Natives being about “casinos, cigarettes, and fireworks” into understanding that Tribes [in this region] are about “protecting the resources, protecting our culture, and our way of life.”

Another participant Millie explained the significance of non-Native teachers learning about Native cultures.

Culturally responsive training helps, even if the topics are uncomfortable for some to hear. I think they should be mandatory and should include testimonies from students. I attended a four-day training last summer and the testimonies from the high school students had the biggest impact on me. I didn’t [previously] know how much it affected the students when their culture was acknowledged and incorporated into their learning.

Ultimately, teacher training related to Native education can enable educators to develop anti-racist and decolonizing educational practices and systems. As part of this, participants found it helpful for teachers and education administrators to begin by examining their own identity. One of the primary difficulties with the way that Whiteness—meaning White identity—is typically constructed is that it is often perceived as ‘unmarked.’ Meaning, many White teachers have been socialized to see their own culture, lifestyle, history, and values as the uncontested “norm” (see also Sleeter *et al.*, 2014). The reality, however, is that ‘White American culture’ is simply one among many that exist in Washington. For Native American children and communities, for example, White American culture is often strange, foreign, confusing, and at times even threatening. Clearly, such conditions are not suitable for learning. Thus, teachers have an obligation to learn about and understand the cultures of their students, so as to create learning environments and experiences that respect and nurture those cultures.

One of the White teachers in the study, Kim, attended such a training on Native education by Susan Friberg and found that she developed a truly transformational understanding of her own racial identity in relation to that of her Native students. Such self-understanding, Kim explained, is a critical part of non-Native teacher development seeing that the aim is to better serve their students.

One of our Native participants, Lisa, went on to explain the importance of teachers also relating these new understandings of themselves to Native American history and the lived experiences of Native American communities:

[Educators]...need to know historical context [of colonization], [understand] racial identity development and...intersectionality [of identity] and how [all of] that impacts students. [...] Another piece would be them [teachers and administrators] going back

and learning about...how...colonization in the education system came about because I don't know if that's something they [have] learned about in [their own] school[ing] [...] Justice is understanding all of these different...histories and...concepts and implementing that into the school system...Educational justice would be when we're learning about different groups...[in] their voices and...not...the master narrative...And how are we incorporating all of these... integrating that within not just history, not just English [but also] math, science, all the different ways... [Teachers would] constantly... be...immersed within these different understandings and different perspectives.

Lisa also touches on an important point: that teacher training in the realm of Native education is something that *all* teachers in Washington have an ethical, professional, and soon-to-be legal obligation to undertake. One of the White teachers that we interviewed for this study expressed confusion in this regard, understanding teacher training focused on Native education as something relevant only to social studies teachers or to teachers who work on Tribal reservations. She pondered if she, as a STEM teacher with just a few Native American students in her classroom each year, needs to undergo trainings related to Native education. Seemingly, she, like many White teachers perhaps, views this as primarily the job of educators who work in the realm of social science education. The response to this teacher participant's question is: based on vast amounts of research on this topic, including our data, all teachers of all content areas and of all K-12 age groups must undergo training in the realm of Native education.

This is because a primary goal of such training is to help educators work more appropriately, effectively, and caringly with Native students, families, and communities. For instance, seemingly mundane day-to-day interactions with Native students in any given math, science, or other classroom involve myriad complex cultural considerations that the child always 'carries' with them as part of their identity (e.g., Philips, 2003). Math and science teachers may not end up teaching the specific history that they learn from such professional development to their own K-12 students, but all teachers must know how to interact and engage with Native students in ways that foster their growth, make them feel safe and respected, and which honor their cultures and histories.

Moreover, no content area itself is 'culture-neutral.' Rather, dominant Euro-American content is often perceived as 'the norm' precisely because of its pervasive dominance. Returning to the example of the White math teacher who participated in this study, Indigenous cultures worldwide have developed their own approaches to mathematics for millennia; one has only to consider the widely touted early Mayan system of mathematics, for example. Thus, in addition to learning about Native culture and history so as to appropriately interact with Native students and communities, other types of teacher learning about Native education can be specific to the content areas (e.g., science, math, music, physical education, the arts, etc.). Indeed, many models such as WSU's Indigenous STEM program for K-12 schools explore the teaching of science and other diverse content areas from Indigenous worldviews (Groves Price & Ruffin, 2021). For instance, STEM curricula rooted in Native American culture and knowledge exist, and it benefits Native children especially to learn about these, in support of their identity development, cultural knowledge, and confidence.

This learning is a long process that must come from different sources. More effort on this regard needs to be done within the broader education system—in teacher preparation for example—to support this type of learning about Native American cultures among White preservice teachers. Lisa explained the importance of this type of learning among non-Natives in our collective quest for educational sovereignty and equity:

The people that are in these positions [teachers and administrators]...have to understand all of these things [related to Native education, cultures, history, and sovereignty] before they can do anything about it because you can't do anything about it if...you don't 'get' [i.e., understand] it. So that deep education that needs to be rooted in their formal education...It should be a part of their education as becoming a teacher, your education becoming an administrator. This should be rooted in your courses that you take.... A continuous education [...] cultural competency... we can never know about all the cultures and be competent within them. It's a process that we will continuously have to learn so maybe increase your cultural awareness or your cultural capacity but the work that has to be done yearly. Every single year shouldn't be this school has these trainings, they do five trainings and then that's it - or I took this one implicit bias class and that's it? No, no, no. These are things that we need to be doing constantly.

Beyond institutionalized teacher development opportunities, all of the Native participants in our study also pointed to the need for non-Native educators, particularly White teachers as the dominant demographic, to undertake frequent ongoing learning of diversity in education. In addition to formal training, educators must also find other opportunities, of their own initiative, to learn about Native American education, culture, history, and more. Non-Native teachers have a moral obligation to take on the work of this learning themselves, through myriad resources that are at their fingertips (e.g., libraries, community events, university courses, etc.). While Native American leaders and educators are often willing to take on extra work to teach non-Native educators in society more broadly about Native cultures, it is immoral for the entire burden of this type of learning by non-Natives to fall to Native individuals themselves (Sleeter *et al.*, 2014).

Finally, because there are 29 Tribes in Washington with their own unique cultures and histories, such training also needs to be rooted in 'the local.' As Joshua explained: "I think we definitely need to get more specific especially with our Tribal schools, we need training of the particular [Tribal] culture[s] that you're in" or that are represented among your students. One crucial way that educators can learn about the specific Tribe or Tribes whose children they teach and/or are geographically closest is through relationship-building between educators and these Tribes. Indeed, relationship building among non-Native educators and educational institutions on the one hand and Tribes on the other hand is often critical to educational sovereignty.

Building Relationships With and For Tribes. Across interviews, Native American participants reported with emphasis and urgency the importance of non-Native teachers and the institutions that they are part of building stronger relationships with Tribes. As mentioned in

the literature review, relationship building is the cornerstone of collaboration between Native and Non-Native stakeholders in education. Indeed, ‘relationship-building’ is one of the ‘Four Rs,’ which form the pillars of how non-Natives should collaborate with Tribes. (The other three R’s are ‘respect,’ ‘reciprocity,’ and ‘relevance,’ as previously explained.) Based on our research and other corroborating studies, such relationship-building is arguably critical to the advancement of educational equity in, by, and for Tribes—understood here as educational sovereignty.

A goal of educational sovereignty is not simply to promote collaboration between Native communities and non-Native stakeholders but rather to truly center Tribes while de-centering the settler-colonial system that does not typically work well for Native American students and communities. Steve, a Native American educator who is active with WEA, explained the importance of what the practical challenges are in the school where he teaches:

Indian education has the parent advisory committee which is mandatory under Title XI [of the Civil Rights Act of 1964]. I think that is a good start....Having Native parents... guiding the work that we are doing [in]...Indian ed...I think is essential. But then how are we expanding that...in every school? How are we then interacting with our parents...our grandpas...grandmas...aunties...uncles and our caregivers...of our children? How are we [as Native Americans] being invited to...[colonial state school] spaces to continue this relationship and to build this relationship? So it's not, you're [as Tribal community members] always coming in – to...[educators in the colonial system]...in ‘our’ space, in ‘our’ rules, in ‘our’ this, in ‘our’ that, in ‘our’ norms ... How are we [Native people] able to interact with the school system...in our own spaces that we have - that are very specific to our norms...our culture, and our values. And doing that...in a good way... that comes from the heart and not just like, ‘Oh, gosh, I... [as an educator am obligated] to do this...’ That’s how we [educators of all backgrounds] should be interacting with the [Tribal] community—in the community ... because that's where some of that disconnect probably lies... [Native communities ask themselves] ‘Why do I always got to come to you?’...What are we [educators] doing and how are we partnering with different Native communities to do that work [of collaboration] on a regular basis? Not a public hearing once a year or a public meeting but [rather] how are we doing this consistently throughout the year and creating those spaces for that to happen?

Related to the topic of relationship-building, while non-Native teachers have a duty to understand Native students and the communities they are part of, particularly vis-à-vis the Tribes represented in their classrooms, this does not mean that non-Native educators have the capacity to act as the proverbial ‘saviors’ to marginalized Tribal communities. Another Native participant, Joshua went on to explain: “The kids here [on the reservation], their needs are different...I know the teachers that come from [outside the reservation]...I feel like they have the attitude of, they're ‘going to fix it.’” Joshua goes on to explain that this is not the right approach, for a number of reasons.

Some participants identified the lack of meaningful relationships as the biggest barrier to educational equity, while others identified it as one of various barriers. Joshua was of the former mindset:

The disconnect is my biggest thing. The teachers and the professionals [just] not understanding the community they are working in...not being a part of the community. I know when I moved back here [to the reservation after living away for some time], it took a while to get [back] into the community, or feel like I was part of the community and know the challenges our community faces. So I know it's hard for these teachers, we don't have a lot of housing for them, we have the teacher bill, but if they could live on the reservation and in the community and show up to these community things that we have, then I think that would go a long way...I think the barrier that they have is ... being...an outsider, it's like when you're separate, you're not 'all in'... And I think that's what it takes to be a teacher.

In this interview data, Joshua offers nuanced and compassionate insights not just into why it is problematic for the community when teachers are not well integrated with the Tribe that they serve, but also as to why it is in some cases difficult for teachers to integrate themselves. While participants acknowledged that non-Native teachers who serve Tribes experience some reasonable logistical challenges in integrating themselves, it is nonetheless critically important that teachers *do* integrate and build relationships with the Tribal community. Supports from the WEA and other educational organizations may be able to help teachers to better integrate themselves into the Tribal communities that they serve. When asked about the specifics of this, Steve responded as follows:

Acceptance and trust is a key issue between [school] staff and community. Some have built that, some [educators] disappears soon as the bell rings, and it shows in the relationships that they have with their students and families they serve. We as Native people need to see you [school faculty and staff] as a member of this community, but you [as an educator]... need to show up – If you don't, you will never build those bridges.

In discussing ways to address challenges or barriers in better serving Native American children and communities, Steve went on to explain that the key solution is “reach[ing] out in meaningful ways to engage our community. We [Native stakeholders] put out an invitation to a meeting, then when nobody [no non-Native teacher] shows up, we give up. Our community needs to see that their input is actually valued, not as a rubber stamp for blind adherence to a shiny new policy. Without meaningful collaboration – this will always be in ‘us’ versus ‘them’ relationship.” Steve goes on to emphasize the importance of school faculty and staff “showing up” for the community, and also the importance of general follow-through by faculty and staff.

One participant expressed frustration by what might be considered hypocrisy on the part of some educators who teach in schools that serve Tribal communities but do not send their own children to those schools. Joshua reported: “Some of them [non-Native teachers] are okay that live in the community, but I know that there are other teachers that refuse to send their kids to the school they teach.” It was telling that most White teachers that Joshua knows do not send

their own children to the school that they work in. Moreover, we got the impression from various participants that it is seen as ‘remarkable’ when non-Native teachers do send their children to be students in the same schools where the non-Native teacher-parent works. Indeed, one of the White teachers who we interviewed explained how her children were the only non-Native students in the entire school where she taught. While not triangulated with observational data, this White teacher expressed feeling well integrated with the Tribe whose children she taught. This is perhaps one indicator of the significance of non-Native teachers integrating their families and selves into the Tribal community in this way. Members of Native communities that we interviewed wanted teachers to truly become a part of that community, not just limiting their presence to being inside the classroom.

At least one participant framed public schools as potential “community partners” in service of Tribes. For example, Steve described the need for more “family engagement activities” between schools and communities, beyond intermittent activities like “the Christmas concert and sporting events.” He went on to say “We [the public school] could be such a meaningful partner for our community, and we are missing out on that.... Let’s bring in the community for more than just isolated events, less be innovative!” He also went on to point out the importance of certain cultural practices in Native communities that are important to gathering and community building, such as hosting and sharing meals at such community engagement events with schools.

Another Native participant, Lisa further explained the profound significance of relationship-building between non-Native educators and institutions with Tribes:

How are we [as educators] engaging with the community in a meaningful way to where we're mending those [scars]... (*stops to rephrase*) I [actually] don't want to call it a ‘scar’ because I don't even think it's a scar yet—but how are we helping to close that wound and heal those communities and then create that relationship—that authentic genuine relationship with them where it's not just ‘all business’ with school. Because we all talk about the whole child focus...but how are we really working with the whole child when we don't even work with their family that way.

Lisa emphasized that another important dynamic that non-Native teachers must take into account when collaborating with and building relationships with Tribes is the long history of colonization. The physical as well as cultural genocide that Tribes have experienced over the past centuries has clearly left its mark. Thus, meaningful relationship-building does not occur quickly but rather carefully and over time. Moreover, non-Native educators must be sensitive to the individual and collective trauma that Tribal communities carry, which can inevitably affect relationships.

Two of our participants, Howard and Weston, who were Native educators, educational administrators, and leaders within the same Tribe provided some insights into the time and care that relationship-building takes. They described a successful partnership that their Tribe developed with the local school district. As this partnership between these participants' Tribe and the school district developed, there was also a recognition that there is still a long way to go

and that not everyone in the Tribe supported the early efforts, perhaps out of a feeling of historical distrust or lack of prior efforts made by the schools. When the researcher asked about any barriers they encountered in building the partnership, both Tribal members shared that at the beginning, there was little to no established process in place to invite Tribes into schools and classrooms but that this was a chance to be a part of establishing that process. One participant reported: “The local Tribes need to get more involved in that process and step up to those tables with these school board members to make sure your voice is being heard.”

As a Tribal council member and parent, Howard described how a non-Native vice-principal initiated a relationship with him by asking how the school could work better with the Tribe to make Native students feel more comfortable. This request led to an ongoing partnership over the past two years with a lot of momentum and change happening in the first four months: the launch of a Native American Heritage Day, canoe family performances, Tribal council members coming into schools to help supplement STI, and teacher professional development opportunities. Eventually they were able to work with the school board to also create a land acknowledgement agreement. This example illustrates the phenomenal educational outcomes that can result from (non-Native) educators make efforts to build relationships with Tribes (and vice versa). Such relationships are an important part of the pathway toward educational sovereignty.

These two participants also shared that early relationship-building was sometimes set back. Some Native participants expressed that there are far too many Non-Native principals and teachers who do not understand the Indigenous people around them. Such non-Native educators sometimes seem uncertain as to who to talk to or more importantly how to have the conversation. Some of our Native participants explained that no one wants to admit that they are ignorant to this knowledge—that they have not learned about Tribal sovereignty and Native culture and history. Howard and Weston explained: “We hear a lot of that. It's just ignorance. It's the unknown, it's the uncertainty and I tell them [non-Native educators], ‘I’m here to teach you that’...I know it's hard for teachers and principals and people of high stature to say, ‘Well, I need to go back to school and be taught.’” Thus, the previous topic that we explored related to non-Native educator learning and the current section on relationship-building are inextricably interrelated. This interrelated learning and relationship-building must be built on a foundation of trust.

Lastly, these two participants spoke candidly in recognizing that systemic change can be challenging, particularly for members of the socially dominant group but emphasized the necessity of such change, based for example on ongoing historical inequities that colonization has brought about. This participant concluded: “Everybody needs to be teachable and everybody needs to be open to that change...It's going to be tough. But, we've had it tough for a long time... but it's flowing a lot better, I tell them. The stream is moving better, or guess what? We're all in a canoe paddling at the same time now.” Educational sovereignty depends on non-Native and Native stakeholders working toward and investing in Native education, which is an ethical imperative in the collective quest for educational equity in Washington.

What Educational Sovereignty Can Look Like in Practice (RQ 4)

In this last findings section—in response to the last RQ (4)—we focus on and describe what educational sovereignty can look like in practice. The various examples that we offer here include schools’ explicit ongoing acknowledgement of Tribal sovereignty as a dimension of educational sovereignty, and various culturally-sustaining pedagogies and lessons – which by definition center Native children, worldviews, and communities. The examples that we describe are not exhaustive of all of the possibilities for educational sovereignty. Rather, these represent salient examples that emerged in our data.

Regarding the first example of educational sovereignty in practice, it is logical that the mere acknowledgment of this and of other aspects of Tribal sovereignty are an important first step. Howard provided us one such powerful example—the recent inclusion of Native nations’ flags on some K-12 school campuses as a visible reminder of Tribal history and that all gathered there for teaching and learning purposes are on Native land. Moreover, the addition of the Tribal flags to schools demonstrates ownership and belonging to the students. Howard explained further: “It’s just really exciting...how that’s all panning out..That didn’t happen out of luck, by no means, that was a lot of blood, sweat and tears. Not only from the folks that are taking part now, but from our Elders to make sure that their vision is coming to life.” The work of acknowledging Tribal sovereignty and educational spaces that this one Western WA Tribe is doing with their local school district can be emulated by other schools across the state, who have an ethical imperative to do so.

Another overarching topic and example from our data which illustrates what educational sovereignty can look like in practice relates to the day-to-day on-the-ground happenings that constitute teaching and learning. Educational sovereignty centers Tribes’ needs and the desires of Native families. In the classroom, this includes numerous considerations such as the role of family in students’ “formal” education, cultural-educational values and priorities, and the types of activities and lessons that constitute teaching and learning.

Regarding the former, multiple participants in our study expressed how children’s caretakers and parents should be included and respected in schools as key guides in their children’s education. For instance, Joshua explained: “I do think there should be more parental involvement in the classroom – I really do – the parents that can. A lot of us are related, and I

know that when I’ve gone in [to the school], the kids are excited to talk about ‘if we’re related,’ ‘if I know their parents or grandparents.’” Joshua noted the importance of family members being able to “[make] that connection” between school and home. He went on to explain:

[W]hen there are other adults around, besides the teacher, sometimes the students will be more open to what those other adults [from the Tribe] are saying. I don’t know exactly why, but it just seems like more of a community [when family comes into the school], like what we [our ancestors] used to do, it wasn’t just one teacher with a bunch of kids, it was, a whole group of people.

For non-Native educators, centering families as part of the project of supporting educational sovereignty involves expanding their cultural understanding of ‘family’—meaning, recognition that the conceptualization of family in many Native communities differs from that of settler-colonial society. For example, family in Native contexts is most often intergenerational and not ‘nuclear.’

Regarding this second general consideration in our examples of educational sovereignty—cultural-educational values and priorities—part of this overarching effort of supporting educational sovereignty means that the education system and individual educators must recognize and embrace Native values around education. It is worth noting that all of our Native American participants brought up the teaching and learning of their ancestral languages as an important aspect of culturally sustaining and relevant pedagogy and of educational equity. Indeed, previous scholarship has also linked Indigenous language education and reclamation with both educational sovereignty and culturally responsive pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014). While numerous participants brought up this topic of Indigenous language education and reclamation as a top priority, they also expressed concern that opportunities for Native American children and adolescents to learn their languages are currently lacking. This is another issue that we will return to at the end of the report, in the “suggestions” section.

Another dynamic of culturally sustaining and relevant pedagogy includes expectations for what student engagement looks like in Native contexts, as one non-Native participant Kim explained, based on her extensive multi-year experience teaching many Native children:

Schools deal with certain cultural expectations, like what you expect a student to look like in a classroom...For a Native... student, this is kind of just depends on the student, but it can look very different. Compliance is different than engagement. What I have seen in my students is that they definitely react differently in the classroom than like a group of predominantly White students. So, my expectations for what engagement looks like have had to change since being out here [at this reservation] and working with this...All of my kids [i.e., students] are Native...It's just very different when the entire classroom is Native American...I would say that teachers take things for granted and they can't with Native Americans, or any minority group.

What’s more, culturally sustaining and relevant pedagogy necessitates knowledge of and relationships with individual students. Lisa expressed this eloquently: “The ability to connect on a human level and have a genuine relationship and want to know about your students is a great foundation for anything else.” Lisa went on to explain that teaching Native American students must go far beyond the “mechanics” of pedagogy, in terms of lesson plans, content, and more. She went on to say:

Anyone can do that...but if we can't connect with them on a soul level, and I say soul level because it has to be like that. It can't be superficial.... It has to be relational, genuine, coming from your heart..[I]t has to come from your heart to relate and ...understand and...want to know about your students, because if you don't know them what does any of that other stuff matter...if they don't feel like their teacher cares about them.

In a sense, Lisa is describing both good pedagogy in general—given the importance of teacher-student relationships in many educational cultures (e.g., Noddings, 2013)—while also highlighting what she considers to be an important part of education for Native children in particular. She describes heartfelt caring relationships between teachers and Native students as a cornerstone of educational sovereignty. Learning is relational, and building an environment of trust and safety is critical.

Lisa then went on to explain how these types of deeply caring and genuine relationships positively affect teaching practice. She described a teacher who was able to successfully implement culturally diverse and inclusive literature in her classroom, with related content necessarily involving sensitive themes of racism and bigotry. Different from Kim’s class where all of the children were from the Tribe, Lisa described a classroom where Native American students were present but not in the majority. Lisa explained:

She [the teacher that I admire] incorporated some different things that might be unfamiliar for...[students] and a little uncomfortable talking about. But she would not have been able to do that if she did not have a relationship with those students and created [and]...cultivated an environment of trust and a safe space...She's only able to do that by having that relationship with her students...[Y]ou see it in the classroom, you feel it in the classroom when you walk in there. Kids are able to be more open to discussing things they might not normally discuss because they know if they don't know the right answer or maybe might not say the right thing, that they're [nonetheless] in a space where they can learn without being ridiculed... They're not going to have to worry about their peers attacking them in the classroom because the teacher's not going to let that happen...In the class...there's a space of respect for each other and a space to teach each other and to learn from each other.

Lisa’s brief vignette provides a useful reminder that educational sovereignty is not a concern only for educators who are teaching classes or schools populated predominantly by Native students or when teachers are on a Tribal reservation. Rather, Tribal sovereignty is a right and status that all Native children ‘carry’ with them wherever they go as a defining feature of their cultural and Tribal-national identity. Thus, all teachers who interact with and educate Native children ‘have’ educational sovereignty and the implications of autonomy and equity that it implies, regardless of the number of Native students that a teacher may work with at a given moment in time.

The epistemologies and values that are the foundation of a Tribe’s culture and broader life world also shape the types of pedagogical practices (e.g., activities, interactions, and lessons) that can be best suited for Native American students. Indeed, some of our participants provided us some poignant examples of Tribal sovereignty in the form of hands-on activities and lessons. One common theme with regards to hands-on pedagogical practice across multiple participants is the importance of land-based education for Native American children and youth. Joshua offered a compelling description and explanation of an activity done at the school on the reservation, where children from his Tribe comprise most if not all of the students:

I know there have been a couple lesson plans, where we [the children, teachers, and I] go out...on the land...The kids are learning that way, and I know that the kids really enjoy it – Just being there and seeing they are learning... I think that's the best way...I definitely think that being out on the land more and teaching that way would be good [... Also] there's one culture teacher in particular that I've seen... with little kids... Because...we're teaching the history, we went to the [Tribal cultural center] and we were taught the history of that place, but also we greeted the...little...river right there ...[A]ll the kids did that...they were all involved...we also learned some...words [that are part of our Indigenous language] while we were doing that, and we actually saw a big old moose....I know the kids really loved that and just...that whole immersion...I still think about it. We talked about the sweat and what we use the sweat for...A lot of the kids didn't know that we used it not just for praying, but just for daily cleansing...I think they learned a lot that day.

This is undoubtedly an extremely powerful and vivid example for teachers of educational sovereignty in practice.

Importantly, the specifics of educational sovereignty in practice—and of land-based and culturally sustaining pedagogies—vary from Tribe to Tribe. As a very basic example, for coastal Tribes in Washington, the sea is an important part of the environment. By extension, fishing is central to some coastal Tribe's current lifeworlds. One participant described fishing as being an issue of survival. This is the type of reality that informs pedagogies that the Tribe would consider as culturally sustaining. In the words of one participant, Weston, this reality regarding the importance of fishing for cultural and physical survival “shows me that we as Native people have to get back to our way of life. We have to get back to our culture and our history.”

Another participant, Howard, who is also a Tribal council member and parent from this same coastal Tribe, shared how he worked with schools in a nearby town to supplement STI with specific teachings from his Tribal culture: “I was teaching, not only about canoes but then salmon because I'm a fisherman and I smoke fish and...was a geoduck diver. So I had all these tools where I was able to talk to them, and it turned into projects the kids could do [to learn] about the canoe journey.” He also grew the curriculum by paying close attention to the interests of the students and making connections to what they had read about in their history books to how Tribal people live today. Students wanted to know about hunting, living, and gathering and so they used materials from the Tribal archives to answer those questions. This also evolved into discussions of their treaties and how treaty rights offer protection for their way of life.

Ultimately, Indigenous and culturally sustaining pedagogies—a form of educational sovereignty—for a given local Tribe centers around questions like: What do Tribes want to sustain? What can education offer Native youth, looking beyond Euro-American epistemologies, values, and priorities? Throughout this last findings section, these aforementioned examples of Indigenous and culturally sustaining pedagogies offer just a few examples in response to the fourth research question about educational sovereignty in practice

DISCUSSION

Native Americans are a large and unique minority group in Washington, and though Washington is often thought of as a progressive state, educational equity for Tribes is unfortunately not a current reality. There is much work to be done in order to attain educational equity for Tribes in this region. Moreover, as we have shown through our data, educational equity from the perspective of our participants can be defined in terms of educational sovereignty. We believe that this represents one key insight from our research.

As with nearly any endeavor or discussion involving Native American Tribes, sovereignty is critical. We view educational sovereignty is both a *goal* and *means* of attaining educational equity. Educational sovereignty is on the one hand the goal of educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes because full educational sovereignty has not yet been reclaimed, due to the settler-colonial conditions that plague Native education in Washington. On the other hand, educational sovereignty is also the means for attaining educational equity because the aspects of sovereignty that currently exists—albeit ‘incompletely’ in a sense—are critically bolster the work of obtaining more complete educational sovereignty.

As we conclude this report, we recall a perspective that comes up both in the literature on Native education and in some of our own experiences: unlike Euro-Western paradigms and discourses around “equity,” many Native American communities view “responsibility” as central to any discussion of equity. Indeed, Tribes not only desire educational equity and educational sovereignty, but some Native worldviews conceptualize educational equity not only as a right but more so perhaps as the *responsibility* of Tribal members. However, in the current settler-colonial society of Washington, in which the Tribes in question are embedded, many Tribes are not afforded the conditions which allow them to exercise this cherished responsibility. We have attempted in this report to layout some ways that Native and non-Native educators can help create better conditions for educational equity vis-à-vis Tribes.

Regarding some limitations of our study, our sample size was small, though that is not unusual in this type of in-depth and qualitative research. Moreover, our findings are confirmed by the results of other similar studies. Additionally, while we might have preferred in various cases to talk more about the individual cultures and experiences of the Tribes to which our participants belonged, we were not able to do so due to broader intergovernmental and inter-institutional agreements between WSU and Tribes that shape research policies there. Of course, we understand and fully acknowledge that each Tribe is unique. It would perhaps be useful to conduct future studies on particular Tribes, with appropriate permissions. As another potential limitation of the study is the fact that both of our White teacher participants were arguably fairly progressive educators. Meaning, we do not have data on White teachers who may be less open to social change and progress than Sadie and Kim. Indeed, more research on educational equity vis-à-vis Native education in Washington state is needed all around.

Lastly, we wish to point out that some of our analysis may resonate with findings from other reports for this overarching WEA project focusing on educational equity for other minoritized groups (e.g., students of color, immigrant populations), while other issues in our report are

quite unique to Native American education. Indeed, Native students share some similar educational challenges with students from other minoritized groups; however, the unique relationship between Native peoples and the U.S.'s federal, regional, and local governments means that Indian education carries different responsibilities and obligations.

“Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaborations in practices of Indigenous educational sovereignty present pressing tensions and challenges to be negotiated” (Anthony-Stevens, 2017, p. 81). We now turn to a recap of some specific recommendations for the WEA that draw on various aspects of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WEA AND WASHINGTON EDUCATORS IN GENERAL

Across participants, there was widespread consensus that there is a need for a complete overhaul of the education system for Native students. Thus, profound changes are needed in order to support Tribes, reclaim educational sovereignty, and attain educational equity. Surface-level gestures and minor modifications will not suffice, and some difficult changes will need to be made in order to attain the goal of educational equity with, for, and by Tribes. That said, such changes are well worth the effort, as Native children's basic rights and experiences of human dignity are at stake.

The needs of each Tribe, child, and family that is part of the Native education system in Washington varies, thus we cannot provide definitive recommendations that universally hold true for all Tribes and all Native individuals. However, we can offer with recommendations that were apparent across various participants and the Tribes that they affiliated with, as follows:

- Policies that can support educational sovereignty across all types of schools that serve Native American students need to be re-examined, prioritized, and fully implemented.
- Implement extensive and intensive supports to increase the base of Native teachers, Native administrators, and other leaders from Native backgrounds within the educational system broadly conceived. This must include supports for: a) preservice teachers from Tribes who attend teacher preparation programs at universities, b) hiring practices that help achieve this overarching goal, c) retention of Native individuals who work in schools, and d) more. As another example, creating systems within schools whereby Native educators can find support from true ‘on-site’ allies, including among non-Native colleagues, would be helpful. Wherever and however Native educators and future Native educators can be supported, it is important to do so.
- Washington teachers in general and the WEA—across its membership—need to develop a better understanding of the needs of Native students and families.
- Actively create, support, and require teaching practices, curricula, policies, and professional development opportunities that embody and accomplish Native communities’ goals for education. This involves understanding that Native communities’ unique culture-specific goals for education often differ from those of dominant social groups.

- All Washington teachers of all content areas (e.g., math, science, language arts, social studies, music, and more) and of all age groups must undergo training in the realm of Native education, not just social studies teachers or teachers working on reservations.
- The WEA also needs to better understand the impact of racism and intergenerational trauma on Native youth and develop better policies for how teachers and administrators can combat bullying in schools and address other systemic forms of racism in school environments. One participant described the need to shift away from White supremacy culture of the WEA; another discussed how some WEA members on the Eastern part of the state dropped out of it once they learned of the WEA's increased efforts to support minoritized communities.
- While WEA is a union for teachers, the institution also has a clear obligation to families and children state-wide, including Native communities. Thus, the WEA needs to be careful about whom they are 'protecting.' As educators, we should be asking what is in the best interests of students and families. For instance, it takes a certain type of teacher to work successfully in Native communities and not all teachers will be a good fit especially if they are not willing to learn about the local Tribal community or spend extra time getting to know their students and their families.
- Teachers and the WEA in general need to develop stronger partnerships with OSPI's Office of Native Education (ONE). Relationship-building between state organizations and non-Native educators on the one hand and Tribes and Native communities on the other are critical to nearly all aspects of the overarching goal discussed in this report: achieving educational equity and reclaiming educational sovereignty for Tribes. For example, this includes making a concerted effort to reach out to Tribes all across Washington with the understanding that relationship-building is not typically a fast process and can involve challenges along the way. For example, in order to build authentic relationships, it is also important to take ownership for past mistakes and misguided policies that may have inadvertently caused harm to Native communities.
- The STI curriculum is an invaluable tool and policy, which needs to be better tracked and more evenly and widely implemented. For example, the one participant's reported implementation rate of 50% is too low. Also, more opportunities for input from Tribes regarding their satisfaction with the content should occur.
- Educators and institutions must be willing to confront the truth about the types of uncomfortable yet widespread issues raised in this report (e.g., teachers' unconscious personal biases, racism, settler colonialism, educational inequity) even if this is a difficult process. This type of growth and realization is critical to achieving real understanding.
- Non-Native educators—and White educators in particular as members of the socially dominant/privileged group—must take responsibility and spend time and effort learning about Tribes and how to advance educational equity. Tribes are willing to educate non-Native individuals and institutions on Tribal history, culture, and current issues they are facing. However, often Tribal leaders and members simply cannot bear all the responsibility for educating non-Native individuals. For example, reputable resources are available online and through other public avenues for non-Native educators to learn more about Tribes and the challenges that they face, for example through university websites, the OSPI/ONE, and other institutions. Additionally, vetted workshops on Tribal

history and culture, sovereignty, and racism, among other topics, are good growth opportunities for White educators.

- Increased support for the teaching and learning of Tribal languages in K-12 schooling is need, as this was one topic that many Native American participants in the current study spontaneously brought up as a priority. Language learning is rather distinct from other types of content-area learning (e.g., math, science, history), and many Tribes are in great need of more Tribal language teachers. Thus, Indigenous language reclamation within education requires ample funding and unique types of support, in addition to community education about language learning processes (e.g., socio-cognitive and otherwise).
- The limits on state support for Tribal compact schools (STECs) are, according to some of our participants, highly problematic and an impediment to educational equity/sovereignty. These policies need to be re-examined to see how more support can be offered to STECs.
- Washington teacher organizations can foster a better future by making a commitment to systemic change and a continuity of people and ‘messaging.’ When turnover occurs frequently, Tribal members in the study expressed frustration at the experience of building relationships with state administrators, teachers, and other non-Indigenous stakeholders and entities only to have people transition on, starting the process over again.
- A concrete commitment that the WEA could make is to offer ongoing professional development and coaching for member teachers and administrators on how to partner with their closest Tribe(s).
- The WEA has its own belief system and mission, based in a particular cultural paradigm. Tribal communities and schools typically have different systems of belief. As part of the union/WEA, teachers participate in multiple cultural worlds and belief systems, whether or not they are aware of it. Overall, we recommend that the dominant WEA membership take some time to identify the connections between their system of beliefs and Native American worldviews. Related to this, teachers and other educators need time and space to identify connections and differences across such different systems of belief. They can and must use such opportunities to find connections between belief systems and ways to better serve students.
- More research and data about educational equity for, by, and with Tribes and about pathways for educational sovereignty are needed. Currently, there is a surprising dearth of data and publication on these topics. Regional universities, research organizations, and the broader educational system can and should support this type of research.

CONCLUSION

While some of the findings from the current study may seem stark and some of our recommendations challenging, we firmly believe that these are all very feasible pathways toward educational equity and educational sovereignty. The four of us have ourselves used and experienced some of these very recommendations and continue doing so. Moreover, thinking

of the predominately White demographic that makes up the WEA, we can offer some insights. For instance, while we mention in the recommendations immediately above that relationship-building between settler-colonial state institutions and non-Native educators on the one hand with Native communities on the other does take time and effort and is not without certain challenges, those of us who have engaged in such relationships often find them to be extremely fruitful, lifegiving, and fulfilling. In our personal experiences, these can be deeply enriching and exponentially increase White educators' ability to do their jobs of serving Native students in the way they are ethically called to do.

Finally, we end this report echoing the words of wise Indigenous colleagues from years past, which still hold true today, we believe:

When we remember that we live in a world where many cultures co-exist, we realize the importance of understanding each other. Today, our common denominator collectively places great value on the written word; this document itself represents Indigenous advocates reaching out to representatives of a culture that reveres documentation. But truly...we must remember that it is not the study itself that is important; it is the [subsequent on-the-ground] results that are important, the sincerity, and the partnerships that are being created and fortified...At stake is our very survival (Pavel *et al.*, 2008, p. 3).

Indeed, Native American education today plays a critical role in shaping the future of our state and in the cultural and physical survival of Tribal communities in Washington. It is up to educators and educational communities such as the WEA to decide if and how they will respond to the call.

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APPENDIX A TEAMWORK AND AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Importantly, this report could not have been created without all four of us as authors, and we all played critical roles in the team. Melodi has extensive researcher and community member expertise in Native education broadly conceived, including experience with Washington's *Since Time Immemorial* curriculum. Moreover, as the senior member of the team, Melodi led us in many key ways with her general wisdom and understanding of Native education from a range of perspectives (e.g., as a community member, parent, grandparent, emerging Elder, researcher, and more). Melodi also brought an anti-colonial lens to the work as a kind of 'outsider' to certain aspects of the education system, and as a result of her own education, experience, and contributions in Indigenous research methodologies. Another member of our team, Laina brought unique and invaluable insider insights as a practicing educator herself, currently in the very system that our report focuses on. Thus, she has in-depth insider knowledge of Native education in Washington that was central at various stages in crafting the report. Laina also brought the contextual experience of growing up in the WA state education system and of teaching, parenting, and administering in her own community. Both Melodi and Laina participated in the study design, data collection, regular meetings about overarching analyses and the content of the report, providing feedback on final versions, and more.

In this authorship context, Anne Marie and Dana were the two lead authors on the report in the sense that Euro-Western authorship paradigms typically understand authorship. Together, they took the lead for this team on analyses, coding, drafting extended analytic memos, and in

meeting regularly one-on-one to discuss the direction of the paper. Dana is well-versed in the

general academic literature on Native American education and ‘knows the language’ of educators at the level of WEA. Dana also contributed to the writing of the final report itself by: drafting part of the introduction (p. 3), most of the background section (around p. 4), and portions of various other sections of this final report. She also contributed content regarding the description of the STI curriculum (beginning on p. 27). Dana also played a lead role in compiling key reference resources and in editing the manuscript.

Finally, Anne Marie as the only self-identified White researcher on the team tends to see Native education through the lens of a White person, which she often thought about in reflecting on the worldviews of the WEA teacher majority (i.e., other White middle-class women). Anne Marie took a lead on the ‘traditional Euro-Western’ research tasks (e.g., literature review, writing of the final text). She wrote the majority of the final text of this report itself (e.g., in terms of the page count), though always in close and continuous consultation with her three Native co-authors. Also, Anne Marie drew on her experiences as a former K-12 teacher, current K-12 teacher educator in Washington, and deeply involved aunt of 5 toddlers and preschoolers. Her close, longstanding relationships with her Indigenous Yucatec-Maya-speaking communities continuously guide her as well.