Montana
Office of Public Instruction
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opi.mt.gov

Funding Spectrum Guide
American Indian Achievement Gap

The 2009 Legislative Session provided a continuation of school funding directed toward closing the achievement gap between Indian and non-Indian students. This guidance is designed to provide a snapshot of activities in which schools can meaningfully utilize this funding to meet the Legislature's intent. This list is not exhaustive and is purposely open-ended. It is meant to spark discussion and imagination – the actual decision is a local one.

Successfully closing the achievement gap in Montana will require concerted and focused efforts in our schools that serve American Indian students. It is an effort that will require the cooperation of school leadership, school boards, staff, students and their parents/guardians, community, and other area organizations and entities, including tribal governments. We know too well the negative impacts of the achievement gap – dropouts, unemployment, even incarceration – and we must all accept responsibility for bringing about its end for the success and future of all Montana.

Of great importance in this effort are strong and sustained leadership and staff who believe that all students can succeed and who work to bring about positive change through high expectations and academic rigor. We must provide ALL students with the equality of educational opportunity which is guaranteed to them in Montana's Constitution. Above all, it is paramount to develop a district wide, systematic plan to address all areas that contribute to the achievement gap in your district. School leadership and staff should attend professional development opportunities related to achievement gap issues and should be aware of current research and promising practices that have proven effective and keep students actively engaged in school. The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is committed to this work and will assist districts. Check the Web site often for updates and information – www.opi.mt.gov/IndianEd.

Another important step is to make classroom learning relevant through the use of culturally appropriate materials and instruction. It also means providing teachers with quality professional development that will help them effectively teach students who are culturally and/or economically different from themselves.

In addition, gather accurate resources and materials about American Indians. Stock your library. Buy classroom sets of novels relating to American Indian issues. Set up a professional development library with books or education journals about Indian education. Find suggested resources on the OPI Web site. Fill your halls with historical and contemporary portraits of life and citizens of various Indian tribes. Bring in American Indian speakers or cultural leaders with whom American Indian students can identify and make connections.

Those schools that receive funding for ANB Indian student count (per MCA 20-9-330) to close the achievement gap between Indian and non-Indian students should consider the following recommendations:

<u>If your school receives $100 - $1,500</u>

- Survey staff to find out immediate needs for materials, professional development, and culturally relevant and/or differentiated instruction.
- Update your library with OPI suggested resources: American Indian fiction, non-fiction, poetry, anthologies, reference materials, tribally specific materials, DVDs, CDs, teacher guides, instructional aids, research, reference materials, etc. (see the Resource Guide on the OPI Web site: http://www.opi.mt.gov/indianed).
- Offer student-achievement related professional development in the form of online or in-person presentations, workshops, or training.

- Arrange student field trips to American Indian cultural or historical areas.
- Develop/refine local student assessments to determine proficiency with Montana Content and Performance Standards specific to American Indian content.

<u>If your school receives $1,500 - $5,000</u>

- Invite paid guest speakers to offer presentations or workshops for students or staff that corresponds to student achievement.
- Develop a comprehensive professional development library for staff.
- Send staff to regional and statewide professional development focused on student achievement (see Professional Development Opportunities on the OPI Indian Education Web site: http://www.opi.mt.gov/indianed).
- Pay costs for substitutes and travel so that teachers can visit schools and classrooms that are utilizing effective programs or promising practices in closing the achievement gap.
- Set up groups or committees to review existing curriculum and resources and provide stipends to those staff members who participate.

<u>If your school receives $5,000 - $10,000</u>

- Provide professional development on-site or at other locations that corresponds to the achievement gap or at-risk youth.
- Provide tutoring, credit recovery programs, and summer school for Indian or at-risk students.
- Develop an in-service process for new teachers to the district to assist them with community and school culture. Create teacher handbooks that include information about incorporating Indian topics into the classroom.

<u>If your school receives $10,000 and up</u>

- Pay your teachers to research programs and curriculum to find appropriate material they can use to assist in closing the achievement gap.
- Because current research demonstrates that having one caring adult in the school community can make a difference in a student's life, provide stipends to teachers who serve as mentors and advisors to students throughout the year. Teachers can monitor student progress in classes, follow their attendance, build relationships with the student's family, and provide support and guidance.
- Create a teacher exchange with another school and provide paid time to travel and learn from colleagues in other settings.
- Create student exchanges, both online and in-person, with neighboring districts.
- Hire staff to assist your efforts through research, assistance to teachers, and professional development.
- Include Indian content in the hallways and classrooms, including treaties and other historical and cultural documents, portraits of Indian leaders, and Indian artwork.